

## **Briefing Document: 1 John Lesson 63-The Foundation of Christian Assurance**

**May 27, 2026**

### Executive Summary

This briefing document examines the theological concept of "assurance"—the confidence a believer has that they are truly saved and will go to heaven. Based on an analysis of 1 John 3:19, the study explains that assurance is not an intuitive feeling but something a person must learn and discover. While some religious traditions, such as Roman Catholicism and Arminianism, discourage assurance as "presumption" or warn that salvation can be revoked, the biblical text encourages believers to pursue a "full assurance of hope." True assurance allows a person to stand calmly in the presence of a holy God, leading to deeper praise, passionate service, and a stronger commitment to the faith.

### Understanding the Nature of Assurance

1 John 3:19 states: *“And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.”* This verse serves as a gateway to understanding how a Christian can have confidence in their standing with God.

- **The Process of Knowing:** The Greek word used for "know" is *ginōskō*[^1]. It suggests that assurance is a process of learning, finding out, or realizing. It is not necessarily something a person feels automatically; it is a reality that must be grasped through specific evidence.
- **Being "Of the Truth":** This phrase identifies believers as people belonging to both the written Scripture and the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ. To be "of the truth" means that divine truth is the source of a person's existence and life.
- **Persuading the Heart:** The word "assure" comes from the Greek word *peithō*[^2]. While it is often translated as "persuade," it also carries the meaning of tranquilizing or soothing. Assurance acts as a way to calm a troubled heart and quiet an alarmed conscience.

### The Challenge of God's Holiness

A primary reason believers experience doubt and fear is their understanding of God's character. Standing "before Him" can be intimidating because of the contrast between God's perfection and human weakness.

- **The Trauma of the Divine:** Throughout the Bible, people like Isaiah, Ezekiel, Peter, and John were traumatized or fearful when they realized they were in the presence of God. The overwhelming holiness of the Creator naturally exposes the sinfulness of the creature.
- **The Persistent Reality of Sin:** Even when a person's life has changed and they no longer live in a pattern of "unbroken sin," the presence of sin remains in their flesh.

This awareness of failure and weakness in the face of an omniscient, holy God creates a "dread of judgment."

- **The Purpose of 1 John 3:19:** This verse promises that there is a condition by which a believer can tranquilize their fears. They can be calm and confident even while standing in the intimidating presence of the "absolutely holy One."

### Opposing Views on Assurance

Not all religious traditions agree that a person should feel certain about their salvation. Some argue that such confidence is dangerous or impossible.

#### The Roman Catholic View

The Roman Catholic Church, specifically through the Council of Trent, has historically rejected the idea of absolute assurance.

- **Assurance as Presumption:** The Church teaches that knowing for certain that one has obtained the grace of God is not possible without a "special revelation."
- **The Use of Fear:** The Council of Trent argued that if people were certain they were going to heaven, they might become "careless about sin." Therefore, maintaining a level of doubt is seen as a way to keep people working hard to "make it" into heaven.
- **The Pronouncement of Anathema:** The Council stated: "If anyone says that a man who is born again and justified is bound of faith to believe that he is assuredly in the number of the predestinate, let him be anathema." This means a curse is placed on anyone claiming absolute assurance.

#### The Arminian (Wesleyan) View

This view, named after Jacob Arminius and shared by denominations like the Methodists and Nazarenes, suggests that salvation can be forfeited.

- **Revocable Salvation:** Because this theology suggests a person can lose their salvation through their actions, true assurance is difficult to maintain.
- **The Fear of Falling Away:** Like the Catholic view, there is a concern that too much assurance could lead a person to stumble and lose what they have.

#### The Biblical Mandate for Certainty

Contrary to views that discourage assurance, the Scriptures command believers to seek confidence in their salvation.

- **The Command to be Diligent:** *"And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end" (Hebrews 6:11).* The Holy Spirit desires for believers to reach the maximum level of assurance.

- **Confirming the Call:** *“Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10).* Assurance is presented as a goal to be pursued through spiritual diligence.
- **The Fruit of Assurance:** God does not benefit from "fearful, doubting, despairing" Christians. Uncertainty leads to:
  - Weak praise.
  - A poor testimony to others.
  - Lack of passion in service.
  - Difficulty in making the commitment to "deny oneself" and "take up the cross."

Assurance is essential because a believer’s love, service, and praise are directly connected to the permanence of God’s gift of eternal life.

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### **Glossary of Terms**

<b>Word</b>	<b>Phonetic Pronunciation</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Ginōskō</b>	gee-NOH-skoh	To come to know, learn, find out, or realize; often implies a process rather than intuition.
<b>Peithō</b>	PAY-thoh	To persuade; also used to mean tranquilizing, calming, or soothing a troubled heart or conscience.

[^1]: See Glossary of Terms: **Ginōskō** [^2]: See Glossary of Terms: **Peithō**