

PM 1 John 5:13-21 How can we be sure of our Faith?

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- [0 : 00] John's first letter, 1 John chapter 5, verses 13 to 21. So 1 John chapter 5, verses 13 to 21. Entitled in the Bible here, That You May Know, That You May Know.
- John writes, I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life. And this is the confidence that we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.
- And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of Him. If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, He shall ask and God will give him life.
- To those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I do not say that one should pray for that.
- [1 : 25] All wrongdoing is sin. But there is a sin that does not lead to death. We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning.
- But he who was born of God protects him. And the evil one does not touch him. We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.
- And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know Him who is true. And we are in Him who is true.
- In His Son, Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols.
- Little children, keep yourselves from idols.
- [2 : 45] Most of the letters, if not all of the letters in the New Testament, are written to churches where the apostle writing, or the writer, would have recognized that there were problems either within the fellowship that were causing difficulties, or there were problems from out with, attacks from out with the fellowship on the believers.
- And this morning, we thought about what the background was to John's writing of this message to the believers in Ephesus.
- It's believed, and scholars believe, that this letter written to first century Christians was to challenge a group of teachers who were advocating an understanding of Christianity that was different from the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- And we thought about that this morning. These teachers are thought to have been forerunners of something called Gnosticism, believing that there is a sharp dualism between spirit and matter.
- They regarded the spiritual as divine and good, while matter they regarded as created and evil. So forgive me for going through this again, but it's good, because as you look through this letter, you see how John works through this challenge to believers from these people who are preaching the gospel other than the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[4 : 23] They didn't believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. They denied that Jesus came in the flesh, which is why John is at pains in the passage we looked at this morning to say, we have seen him, we have heard him, we have touched him.

God came in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ to this place. They appear to have claimed that they were sinless, therefore they didn't need forgiveness and cleansing by the blood of Christ.

And they didn't accept the validity of the commands that Jesus had given. They claim salvation comes through knowledge of truths brought by the revealer, spiritual, not a physical being.

And it appears they had at one time been part of this fellowship and were taking believers away with this heresy that they were preaching. And John's at pains throughout this letter as you look at the headings for each of the sections.

First of all, it's the word of life. He's introducing the living word of life, the Lord Jesus Christ. Then he talks about walking in the light. Christ is our advocate before the throne of God.

[5 : 46] He writes about the new commandment. He writes about do not love the world. A warning against antichrists. People were coming and claiming to be Christ.

He talks about how we know that we are children of God. He talks about loving one another. He talks about testing the spirits, which is important. He teaches us that God is love.

He talks about overcoming the world and the testimony concerning the Son of God. And then here in these last few verses, he talks, he writes these things that you may know, that you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.

John is known as John the Evangelist. Excuse me. This happened this morning.

I must be doing too much talking. John the Evangelist helpfully tells us why he wrote the gospel that bears his name. In John 20 verse 31, he writes, But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name.

[7 : 08] And then in 1 John 5, he writes, I write these things to you, verse 13, who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

So how can we be assured that we are saved and that when we depart from this world, we will have, or we have, eternal life? As believers, we are children of God.

In John's Gospel, chapter 1 verse 13, he says, Born not of natural descent, nor of human decision, or a husband's will, but born of God.

Born again of the Holy Spirit of God. So let's spend a few minutes considering through John's letter the characteristics of God's children.

1 John 2 verse 29, Everyone who practices righteousness is born of God, writes John. 1 John 3 verse 9, No one who is born of God makes a practice of sinning.

[8 : 20] 1 John 3 verse 14, We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. 1 John 4 verse 7, Beloved, let us love one another.

For love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God, and knows God. And then 1 John 5 verse 4, For everyone who is born of God overcomes the world.

One commentator described these characteristics as birthmarks of those who are true children of God.

There are those who, there's a theologian called Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who I recommend to you if you ever get an opportunity to read any of the things he wrote.

He was executed by the Nazis just before the end of the Second World War. And he wrote about something called cheap grace.

[9 : 27] And cheap grace is when we receive the grace of God and believe our sins to be forgiven by the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. And yet go on sinning anyway, believing that we will be continually forgiven because of the grace of God.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls that cheap grace. And it's the same in what John is writing here. If we bear these birthmarks, we can say with confidence that we're children of God.

But if not, if we continue, the Apostle Paul wrote, should we keep on sinning so that grace may abound? And then he answers his own question, absolutely not.

Absolutely not. If we're born again of the Spirit of God, then absolutely not. But we're up against it, friends. There are three enemies that would seek to pull us away from our faith.

And I'd like to unpack these for a minute or two. Three forms of potential temptation. 1 John 5, 19, John tells us that the world lies in the power of the evil one.

[10 : 48] Satan is an enemy of our souls. He's described in the scriptures as the God of this age, 2 Corinthians 4, 3 and 4. And the prince of this world, John 14, verse 30.

He's the spirit that works in the children of disobedience, Ephesians 2, verse 2. And he has many devices for leading believers astray.

The devil's a liar and the father of lies. And these lies are used to turn people away from God and to disobey God's truth. There's a rather amusing book, but a very poignant book nonetheless, that really makes this very clear.

I don't know if you've read any C.S. Lewis, but another great writer, a Christian, totally committed to the Lord Jesus Christ. And he wrote a book which is amusing but very, very poignant called The Screwtape Letters.

And it's written from the point of view of one of the devil's minions seeking to teach a young convert to Satanism, basically, and how to attack a Christian.

[12 : 01] And whilst it's done kind of tongue-in-cheek, it's very, very interesting. And it's a good book to read. Satan is described as a serpent who deceives in Revelation 12, 9, and a liar who devours in 1 Peter 5, 8 and 9.

He's a formidable enemy. The second enemy is the flesh. And this is when our old selves, our old nature, comes to the fore.

As born-again believers, we have a new nature within us, but we don't always yield to the new nature. So the flesh can be a temptation.

And thirdly, the world. 1 John 2, 15 and 17. It's easy for us to yield to our fleshly desires, the desires of our eyes, and the pride of life.

So how does a believer keep from sinning? Thankfully, the Lord Jesus, in his sacrificial death on the cross, has defeated sin, death, and the devil.

[13 : 12] And in this passage, we're told, as believers, we're kept safe by the power of God. And we have weapons with which we can make a stand against the forces of evil.

And we find these in Ephesians 6, verse 1 following. Some of the armour of God is for our defence, the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith, and fitted with the gospel of peace and the helmet of salvation.

But the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God and prayer, are weapons we can use to take the battle to the enemy. I think I may have told you before that I was doing a seminar in the Ukraine in the campsite owned by Scripture Union at a place called Vosel, which is about 30 kilometres north of Kiev.

And it was for a group of people who were volunteering to train to be leaders at Scripture Union camps throughout the Ukraine. And it had been a full day.

They were up early, they had breakfast, they have a big breakfast in the Ukraine. In fact, I like the way they do things actually. They have a big breakfast in the Ukraine, they have a big lunch so that you're eating when you're using it.

[14 : 29] What do we do? We have a bit of a snack at breakfast, we have a bit of a snack at lunch, and we feed ourselves in the evening, and then we wonder why we put weight on. So these people had had a big breakfast, they'd been doing activities and learning something of the Word of God throughout the morning.

They had a big lunch, they'd had a bit of a break, and then I got the four o'clock spot. And my subject matter for that conference was the armour of God.

And I was working through an interpreter, and I kid you not, people were just sitting, and you could see that they were nodding off to sleep, you know. It was that four o'clock nodding off time of day.

I find that a difficult time personally, that time in the afternoon. But Paul says in that passage that we need to be alert. And he makes it very poignant.

Be alert, because the devil does not sleep. Be alert, and put on the armour of God so that you're aware of the devil's schemes.

[15 : 37] The other thing is that it's vitally important that we seek to memorise as much of the Word of God as possible. I don't think that happens as much as it used to.

I'm grateful that when I came to faith, we ran a course called New Directions in the Baptist Church. And it was a brilliant course because it caused you to memorise passages of Scripture.

Scripture. And those passages of Scripture are now in my mind. And when I feel under attack in the same way the Lord did in the wilderness when he was attacked by the devil, these passages of Scripture come to mind and help me to make a stand against the attacks that may come my way.

Jesus quoted Scripture in the wilderness as we know in Matthew chapter 4 verse 1 following. So that is by way of an introduction into these verses which start off by saying that you may know that you have eternal life.

And this is the confidence that we have towards him that if we ask anything according to his will he will hear us. And so what John's talking about here is prayer verses 14 and 15.

[16 : 55] Verse 15 goes on to say And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask we know that we have the requests that we have asked him for.

Though the Lord Jesus Christ was God in flesh he depended on prayer. Mark 1 verse 35 He arose early in the morning to pray.

Luke 6 verse 12 He spent the night in prayer. He taught his disciples how to pray. And even as he suffered and died for our sins on the cross he prayed.

If Jesus the Son of God needed to pray how much more do we? The Apostle John is convinced of the power of prayer.

So let's think for a few minutes what prayer is. It's interesting that someone once said that there were no atheists on the Titanic once they hit the iceberg.

[18 : 04] So once you know that your life's threatened people call out. Once people find themselves ill and in hospital they begin to think about their mortality and the privilege of spending some time at the hospital as a chaplain and the opportunity to speak with people about eternal matters.

I remember on one occasion one person said to me he said when I die David what happens to all this? and I said this is just a tent it's just a tent in which you live while you're here.

What matters is your soul and that depends on what it is you believe and if you believe and put your faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ when you die you can be sure that you will go to heaven.

The family of this man got very upset or the wife of this man got very upset because they were saying David's trying to convert him but actually another member of the family said thank God thank God there was someone there to say to my father this is the way it is.

But some people use prayer as a form of kind of abracadabra don't they? God is not a genie in the lamp although many may perceive him to be that so we should not use prayer for our own self-interests.

[19 : 41] This is a lovely quote I don't know where I got it from but it says prayer is a force that promotes restorative life bestowed on us by a merciful responsive God that's a good quote isn't it?

Prayer is the force that promotes restorative life bestowed on us by a merciful and responsive God. However there are conditions we as believers must meet when we come to God in prayer.

We must have a heart that does not condemn us. 1 John 3 21 and 22 21 and 22 Beloved if our heart does not condemn us we have confidence before God and whatever we ask we receive from him because we keep his commandment and do what pleases him.

Psalms 66 verse 18 if I cherished iniquity in my heart the Lord would not have listened. So is there any ill feeling between ourselves and our fellow believers?

If so we're instructed to seek reconciliation and forgiveness. Lord Jesus said so that your Father in Heaven may forgive you your sins.

[21 : 08] So we are not to hold on to feelings that are not that which God would have us do.

We are to make efforts to be reconciled to the person, the believer that we have problems with. And sometimes actually from my experience there are times when you make an approach to the person you say I'm sorry can we be reconciled and that person will turn their back on you and walk away.

And that can be very hurtful but the point is that you did what the Lord asked you to do. What the person then does with your move to be reconciled is up to them.

But we should seek to be reconciled. We're required to abide and remain in Christ in love and obedience. And we must pray in God's will.

In the Lord's prayer thy will be done. This is another quote I came across in relation to prayer. Prayer is a mighty instrument not forgetting our will done in heaven but forgetting God's will done on earth.

[22 : 23] A mighty instrument not forgetting our will done in heaven but forgetting God's will done on earth. So how do we determine what God's will is?

Well we could have a series of sermons determining what God's will is but there are three main ways by reading his word the Bible by listening to the spirit as we read the word and by discerning the circumstances around us and asking for other believers to pray with us about whatever that situation is.

Seeking God's will through the word through the spirit and through discerning the circumstances we find ourselves in. And when we pray we're to pray in Jesus name.

Because since his ascension back into heaven Jesus intercedes for us before the father's throne of grace. Timothy writes there is one God and one mediator between God and men the man Christ Jesus 1 Timothy 2 5.

So we can be bold in coming to God in prayer claiming the promises of his word because all the promises in God's word are yes and amen in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[23 : 39] Another commentator wrote concerning prayer we're not beggars we are children coming to a wealthy heavenly father who loves to give his children what they need and the word need was underlined not what we want but what we need.

And this is an important point I think in relation to these verses prayer molds the person who prays. It's not that we change God's mind when we pray but he changes ours bringing us into line with his will.

I hope that's clear. Not that we change God's mind but that he changes ours bringing us into line with his will. Prayer enacted in faith is a conversation between God and ourselves out of which God gives shape for the shape for the future.

We often pray with the future in mind our petitions are granted at once but the outworking may take time for us to perceive that our prayer is answered.

But as I said this morning we need to be on our guard against philosophies and theologies that are not of God.

[24 : 58] God and I came across one of them whilst I was at college and it really upset me a great deal because I was made aware of something called open theism which is a current attack on our beliefs in God.

And those who promote this alternative theology believe that we can change God's mind arguing that God has unlimited knowledge of the past and the present but limited knowledge of the future.

They state that sometimes God alone decides how to accomplish his ultimate goals but in other occasions God works with human decisions adapting his plans to fit the changing situation.

In other words God does not control everything that happens. Open theists go on to claim that in a loving dialogue God invites us to participate with him in bringing the future into being.

and that's true. They rightly remind us that the biblical God is a loving God that prayer is a loving encounter with him and that it matters very much how we pray. But I think we must insist that God is not only present everywhere all the time but is in control of everything and knows everything past present and future.

[26 : 24] We must continue to contend for the truth of who God is. In relation to understanding God's will as we freely make ourselves instruments of God's will he is able to accomplish his will through us.

In a very real sense therefore accomplishing God's will in the world does depend on our prayers. praying in God's will but it's he God who decides the outcome not us.

So what then are we to make of verse 16? This is a very challenging verse. If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death he shall ask and God will give him life.

So those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I do not say that one should pray for that. Now I've had lots of angst trying to work this one out.

There is a sin that leads to death and it's believed to be the deliberate refusal to believe in Jesus Christ or to follow God's commands. It's really loving the world and hating one's brothers and sisters.

[27 : 47] It's also been described as the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit because by refusing to believe in Jesus we're in effect saying that the Holy Spirit's witness about Jesus is a lie.

So it's deliberately choosing not to believe that Jesus is the Christ. Such sins are characteristics of people who belong to the sphere of darkness.

Remember this morning God is light. In him there is no darkness at all and are not compatible with being born again, a born again child of God. Those who deliberately choose to commit sins that lead to death will die both physically and spiritually because they refuse to believe in the one who alone can give life.

And that is our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Ephesians 2 verses 8 to 10 are some of my favourite verses in the whole Bible.

The Apostle Paul writes, We are saved by grace through faith in Christ Jesus. And this is not of our own doing, it's the gift of God, not the result of works so that no one can boast.

[29 : 04] For we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand for us to do, saved by grace through faith.

In him and through faith in him we can approach God with freedom and confidence. Ephesians 3 verse 12. So do you know Jesus as your personal Lord and Saviour this evening?

If not, can I encourage you to consider the lengths to which God has gone in sending his one and only Son to redeem you through his suffering and death on the cross of Calvary?

What more could God have done to bring you back to himself? During 2023, together with some friends, my wife Paula and I took a river cruise on the Rhine.

It was very nice. I recommend river cruises except that I got COVID towards the end of it. But apart from that, it was wonderful. We travelled from Avignon to Lyon and one of the specially laid-on coach trips took us to a town of Beaune which is famous for its wine.

[30 : 18] And whilst wandering around the town, we noticed two street names. Now my friend, she's not brilliant. Paula's is better. One street was called Rue d'Anvers, and the other street was called Rue Paradis.

Rue d'Anvers was a wide and easily accessible street. It was full of shops with expensive labels and other materially desirable goods.

In contrast, Rue Paradis was difficult with steep steps and narrow alleyways. There were various obstacles to navigate, but it gave shelter from the sun which was very hot on that day and eventually opened out into this most beautiful square.

Rue d'Anvers is the road to L. Looks good. Easily accessed. Everything you could want on the way there.

But ends in destruction. It hit me powerfully, and Rue Paradis was very difficult to access. It's like when Jesus spoke about the wide road and the narrow road.

[31 : 33] difficult to access, and yet it opened out into the most beautiful of squares. And it just was a really good, what's the word, analogy of the choices that we need to make.

And there are consequences to the choices that we make. So choose the road that leads to life. Choose the road that leads to heaven.

And the last couple of verses of this passage, this evening's passage, challenge us to think about what do we worship?

What do we worship? I love the last verse. Legend has it that John lived to a very old age, and when he became old and infirm, he would be carried into meetings.

And I love the way that it's told that he addressed people that were gathered as church, as little children. And he would say, even when he could say very little else, he would say, he said, little children love one another.

[32 : 45] That was his mantra. Little children love one another. But here in verses 20 and 21, we're warned against making idols.

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know who is true. And we are in him who is true, in his Son, Jesus Christ.

He is the true God and eternal life. Once again, John is emphasizing, this is the true God, the Lord Jesus Christ. Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

The world is full of material and physical temptations which appeal to the old flesh, but which are not lasting. In Christ, we can be assured that not only do we have fullness of life in this world, but eternal life in the world to come, because Jesus is the true God and eternal life.

Whatever controls our lives and calls the shots in our lives is our God. Is it our bank balance? Our stock portfolios?

[33 : 57] Our material possessions? Covetousness of the possessions of others? All of these can be God's. But none of these give us assurance and lasting security.

None of these have eternal significance. Remember the crash of 2008. What happened to the stock market then? Those who were depending on the billions that they had in the bank all came crashing down.

There is no assurance to be had in material possessions, because they don't last. I've got a car out there that's eight years old. It looked fabulous when I bought it. It's beginning to look a bit knocked about now.

Because it's not, it won't last. There will come a day where it's on, in some yard, being crushed into a box, and hopefully the materials will be used again. Again, the only thing that lasts, the only thing that gives us assurance and security is faith in the Lord Jesus.

So let's bring these thoughts to a close. Jesus demonstrated the recipients of this letter, we call one John, that eternal life is only found in Jesus Christ. Verses 15 and 16, prayer is the most important fruit of Christian assurance.

[35 : 07] And throughout this letter, one of the main focuses is a warning against falling into sin or being in denial of sin. We're also to pray for our brothers and sisters, those who commit sins, provided their sin does not lead to death, whilst being careful that we're not drawn into sin ourselves.

And it's like in the church in Fort William, when we arrived, we'd been made aware of a couple who had come to faith, living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and wanted to share their faith with the other people that they knew.

They were both heroin addicts, they were into serious drug and alcohol abuse, and they were saved. And they stopped taking any substances at all.

And they were brought into the church. And God gave them a heart to go out and reach other people that they knew in the community who had been the way they were.

But because they had no support from the church, no structured support from the church, they were drawn back in. As they went out to seek to save. Those who had been their friends previously, they were drawn back in.

[36 : 31] And when we arrived in Fort William, they were back taking drugs again. And I remember how they, when I first saw them, they came into an evening service, and they had hoods up, and they went into a corner, and they just hid there and never lifted their eyes.

I was delighted to see them, because someone told me this is who they were. And gradually, gradually, they began to realize that even though they'd fallen back, God still loved them.

And that they could come up, come again to the Lord, and repent, and be restored. And they were. Now, I think that's wonderful. They were restored.

Not only were they restored, but they then went on to the Highland Theological College, and got degrees in theology. These are people who had left school for 15, went on, and are now being used of the Lord in Fort William.

Working with people with drink, drugs, and mental health problems. God's an amazing God, and can do amazing things. But I think if we have people who are wanting to reach out to others, then as a church, it's our responsibility to support them.

[37 : 50] Make sure they have the support that they need. I think one word concerning prayer, I think even if the prerequisites of prayer are met, it can be a common experience that our prayers are not answered in the way that we expect them to be.

And as I thought about that, Jesus experienced that in the Garden of Gethsemane, didn't he? We read, on going a little further, he fell to the ground and prayed that if it were possible, this hour might pass from him.

Abba, Father, he said, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me, yet not what I will, but what you will. And I think that's a mantra for ourselves as we come to the Lord in prayer.

Not what I will, but what you will. Your will be done. Through prayer we make ourselves instruments of God's will.

Therefore, God acts powerfully to answer our prayers. And that's been my experience, both personally and collectively. God does answer our prayers.

[39 : 00] He doesn't answer our wants, but he answers our needs. We have a faithful God, a powerful God, who can, as with this couple I mentioned, completely change people's lives.

And I just think, hallelujah. Hallelujah. Where would this couple be now, were it not for the grace and love of God?

Heavenly Father, we thank you for our time together today. We thank you for this letter that John wrote to this church so many years ago, but so relevant still to ourselves, our human condition today.

Thank you for Jesus. Thank you for the one who gave everything to redeem sinners like ourselves. Help us, Lord, to live in such a way that we bring glory to his name and love reflects something of his light and the salt into those around us.

So bless you, Father. Amen. Amen. It's a great letter.