

# Confidence

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, good morning, church. Would you turn with me to the book of 1 John, chapter 5.

So we've come to the end of our sermon series in the book of 1 John. That's page 959 in the Pew Bible. We're going to be looking at the last section of chapter 5, verses 13 through 21.

We'll also have it on the screen when I read it in just a minute. But before we read, before I read for us, let me pray.

Father, we ask for the work of your Holy Spirit now as we draw near to your word. That he would come and he would give understanding to our minds, but also a receptivity of our hearts to really receive what it is you're saying to us for our good and for our spiritual benefit.

Father, most of all, we want to see Christ, our Savior, in a fresh way and behold him with the eyes of faith and know how wide and long and high and deep is your love for us in him, our Savior.

[ 1 : 17 ] We pray this in his name. Amen. All right. John 5, 13 through 21. 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. 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. There is sin that leads to death. I do not say that one should pray for that. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is 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.

[ 2 : 38 ] He is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. So throughout this letter, John has been trying to bolster our confidence, our assurance, that in Jesus Christ, in the biblical gospel, we have eternal life.

Like the gospel of John, the first letter of John ends with a purpose statement. John's gospel, you might remember, that we read earlier in the service, John's gospel ends this way.

In John 21, 20, 31, we read, 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.

In other words, the gospel of John is written to help unbelievers come to faith in Christ and so have eternal life. The letter of 1 John, on the other hand, was written to believers to give them assurance of the eternal life that they have already in Christ.

We see that in verse 13. 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.

[ 3 : 56 ] John wants us to know, to be assured, to be confident that in Jesus, we have eternal life. And this assurance, this confidence, is a good thing.

You know, we tend to think that confidence will lead to arrogance, don't we? But proper Christian confidence, assurance, does just the opposite.

It leads to humility and joy and love. Because this assurance isn't really a confidence that's rooted in ourselves or our own abilities, not even in our own faith.

No, it's a confidence that's rooted outside of ourselves completely in Christ. He's our confidence. So John wants to leave us with an exhortation to live in this confidence.

Live in the confidence that in Jesus the Son, you have eternal life. Now, what does this confident life look like?

[ 5 : 02 ] Well, that's what John kind of shows us as he wraps up his letter. First, he says, it means living in the confidence that God hears us.

Living this confident life of assurance in Jesus Christ means living in the confidence that God hears us. He hears our prayers. We see this in verses 14 through 17.

God hears our prayers. Now, nearly every religion, in every approach to spirituality has something to say about prayer, whether it's the meditation of Buddhism or the set prayers of Islam or the Psalms of the Old Testament.

In fact, one way to approach the question of the religions and to ask which religion might be true is to ask which one gives the best account of prayer?

Which one gives us the greatest incentive to prayer, the greatest freedom in prayer? prayer?

Because after all, what is prayer? Prayer is communion and communication with God.

[ 6 : 12 ] It's fellowship with the divine. And if you can find a religion that unlocks that door, perhaps you have found the real one, the true one.

prayer. The poet George Herbert in his poem about prayer captures some of the wonder and the promise and the desire that we have as humans for prayer.

In one line, he calls it God's breath in man returning to his birth. What a wonderful picture of the intimacy of prayer.

God's breath in us returning to our birth. But then in another line, George Herbert calls it, calls prayer reversed thunder. That is something so full of power that it can shake the heavens.

Is there any religion that can get us there? Which one opens the door on this most basic of human longings for genuine, real prayer?

[ 7 : 19 ] Well, if you compare religions, you'll start to see, I think, that Christianity sweeps the field. For here's a religion that says, God is utterly holy, beyond words.

The God of the Bible is transcendent and mysterious, full of fire and all. But this utterly holy God has come near.

He's opened the door of the heavens, he's pulled the curtain back, and he's made a way for flawed human beings to approach his holiness with confidence.

The Father has sent the Son to remove the barrier of sin through his death on the cross. And then they've sent the Spirit to cause us to be partakers of the divine nature, members of the divine family.

For all who believe in Christ, prayer is now the act of children approaching a loving God who has embraced a sinful world with both arms and yet has not compromised one ounce of his holiness and transcendence.

[ 8 : 38 ] After all, for prayer to really be prayer, don't you need both? Prayer isn't prayer if God isn't holy and transcendent and full of wonder.

prayer. The finite touching the infinite is the very thing that prayer speaks of that we want. So any religion that makes God less than perfectly awful in his holiness can't really offer us true prayer.

But for prayer to really be prayer, God must also be near and approachable. There must be intimacy. There must be intimacy. But how do you get both?

Christianity answers that question like none other. It answers the question of prayer with the cross. At the cross, we see a God so holy that human sin has to be punished.

But at the same time, at the cross, we see a God so merciful that he pays the punishment for sin in his very own being. You see, friend, only the gospel can really give you true prayer, intimate fellowship with a holy God.

[ 10 : 11 ] Only Jesus Christ can usher you into the presence of a blindingly transcendent God and let you be welcomed as a familiar friend or a beloved child.

God. And when you come to believe and trust in Christ, then prayer becomes what Herbert talked about.

On the one hand, God's breath in man returning to his birth. The intimate breathing in and out of a beloved creature simply enjoying fellowship with our creator.

And on the other hand, it's reversed thunder. It is the finite touching the infinite. It's a sound on earth that rattles the heavens and moves mountains.

And look at what John says in our passage. He says, if you are in the sun, Jesus Christ, verse 14, this is the confidence that we have toward God. That if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.

[11:17] 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. God hears and answers our prayers as we pray according to his will.

We know that he hears us, John says. How could he not hear us? God gave his only son for us. God filled us with his own spirit. There could be no more intimate bond between a human and God than what the gospel offers.

But John says he doesn't just hear. God answers. He says we know we have the requests. Now of course, the apostle John knows that often our prayers seem to go unanswered.

We pray for peace, but often our anxiety remains. We pray for a loved one to get well, but so often they remain sick. So how can John say that we have the requests?

Well notice on the one hand that John says we are to ask according to his will. God reveals his will in scripture and as we pray in line with scripture, our prayers will be directed toward the ends that God desires and we will see him make good on his faithful promises.

[12:28] God, as our sovereign, wise, heavenly father, friends, he knows how to answer our prayers better than we do.

We pray for peace, but peace doesn't seem to come. and yet in those moments of trial and strife when the prayer seems unanswered, our sovereign, wise, loving, heavenly father is preparing something greater for us.

Something that if we knew all that God knew, we would agree that God is indeed granting our requests exactly as it should be answered. And this means we can pray freely and confidently.

It means we don't have to get all the words right when we pray. It means we don't have to get all of our motivations right before we pray. Just pray, Christian.

God hears you, and he will answer in the perfect way, at the perfect time. One specific way that John, applies this confidence in prayer, is to our praying for one another in verses 16 and 17.

[13:54] Now, you probably thought when we were reading those verses that they were a bit confusing, right? What does John mean by a sin that leads to death and a sin that doesn't lead to death? It's not 100% clear what exactly John means by that.

In church tradition, this has sometimes been explained as a distinction between mortal sins and venial sins. mortal sins, it is said, are the really bad ones, adultery, murder, and the like.

Venial sins, we're told, are the not so bad ones. But that doesn't seem to be what John is saying here, and that distinction doesn't seem to find much support in the rest of the New Testament. I mean, after all, King David and the Apostle Paul both stand out as examples of an adulterer and a murderer who are both forgiven and healed.

So what is this distinction that John makes? Well, in the context of 1 John, it would seem that sin that leads to death is the sin of entrenched denial that Jesus is the Christ.

An entrenched denial that Jesus is the Christ. Throughout this book, John has been warning against false teachers who have been unsettling the church by teaching false things about the person and work of Jesus.

[15:13] So it would seem to make sense that as John wraps up his letter, he's offering again some warnings and some direction on how to approach this. This sin, this entrenched denial of Jesus as the Christ, inevitably leads to death.

Why? Because in rejecting Christ, these false teachers are rejecting the only source of God's freely given forgiveness.

Apart from Christ incarnate, crucified, and risen, where will they find a substitute for their sins?

Where will they find a sin bearer who lifts the penalty of death?

Where will they find a righteous record freely, freely given to them so that they might be right with God? It can't be found anywhere else.

And so to actively deny Christ is to commit a sin that necessarily leads to death. But why does John say, I do not say that one should pray for that?

[16:22] That seems a bit odd. Is he saying that we shouldn't pray for someone's conversion? I mean, haven't there been many people who at one time rejected Christ only to have their eyes opened by the grace of the Spirit and the preaching of the gospel and then come to repent and believe in him?

Sure. Every Christian in this room that has been true. So what does John mean? Well, this is one of those verses in the New Testament where we can't be exactly sure.

But if I had to make a wager, I think what John might mean here is, don't pray for these people as if they were believers. In the first part of the verse, John is encouraging us to pray for our fellow believers.

To pray for our fellow believers when they're stuck in sin. That God would grant them life. And that life that God grants might look different in different situations.

Perhaps life looks like the strength to overcome temptation in a particularly stressful season.

Perhaps life looks like conviction of sin and repentance when a brother or sister doesn't see the trap that they're in.

[ 17 : 34 ] Perhaps life looks like the joy of breaking free from a destructive pattern of sin once and for all. Our prayers for one another as Christians should include prayers that we overcome sin in our lives.

If our prayers simply stay at the level of our material, physical needs, then we're missing such a big part of our intercession for one another prayer and the freedom that God wants to bring through our prayers for each other.

But John may be saying here that for the person that actively openly rejects Christ, perhaps teaches actively even against the truth of the gospel, John's saying our prayers have to be different in that case.

We can pray for their conversion, of course, but we can't pray for their sanctification. That is their growth in holiness. By rejecting his son, they're still separated from God.

Friend, if that is you this morning, if you're harboring rejection in your heart towards Christ, will you hear John's warning?

[ 18 : 48 ] This is a path that leads to death. Now, I don't know why or how you came to think as you do about Jesus. Perhaps you've been hurt by so-called followers of Jesus and now you want nothing to do with him.

Perhaps you've not really spent much time considering Christ and the idea of God taking human nature to die for your sins, it all seems irrelevant. Whatever it is, would you look again?

Would you look again at Jesus Christ? Yes, those who take up the name of Christ often tragically fall short, but he will never fail you or forsake you.

Perhaps religion feels irrelevant and boring, but you know, Jesus Christ himself was never accused of being irrelevant or boring. Read the Gospels for yourself.

People had all sorts of things to say about him. Some people called him crazy. Some people called him demon-possessed. At the end of his life, there were a lot of people recognizing him as a political threat.

[ 19 : 59 ] But no one ever seemed to call Jesus boring. And then there were those who heard his voice and saw in him a mercy and a holiness like nothing else.

And the more they spent time with him, the more they were driven again and again to one conclusion. The very conclusion he himself kept telling them and showing them in a hundred different ways.

That he was the Christ. God in the flesh, the Redeemer and their Lord, the long-awaited King of Israel and the King of all nations.

Friend, you can know that you have eternal life. You can know that God hears you and loves you and answers your prayers. How?

You can know this in Jesus Christ. This is true for everyone who's placed their trust in him and it can be true for you too. That's what John's telling us.

[ 21 : 05 ] But this confidence in Christ means that God doesn't just hear us. He also protects us.

He doesn't just hear us. He also protects us. This is John's second point. We can have the assurance, the confidence that God protects us from evil and we should live in this confidence of God's protection.

Look again at verses 18 and 19. John says, we know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who is 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. You know, according to the Bible, the world is a spiritually charged place. There's real evil in the world.

There are principalities and powers at work. But there's also real evil in our own hearts. We live in a fallen world and we carry this fallen nature inside of us as well.

[ 22 : 07 ] And apart from God's gracious intervention, we're captive to those fallen desires. You know, we're thrown into life and we think that we're free, but actually we're enslaved.

The drive for money and success or love or power, we think we control it and then we find that it controls us. It's like a snowball that keeps gaining momentum as it rolls down the hill, getting bigger and bigger, and suddenly it's out of our control.

It's an avalanche. But God doesn't leave us there. God does graciously intervene, and he has intervened in Christ.

Those who are in Christ, John says, have been born of God. They don't belong to the world anymore. They've been set free from the power of the evil one that holds sway over the world. And the power of internal sin has been broken in those who have been born of God.

John says, everyone who's been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who is born of God protects him. Now this has been a theme throughout the letter of 1 John.

[ 23 : 22 ] And you'll remember that when John says we don't keep on sinning, he means it's not our life anymore. That habitual control that sin once had over us is broken.

Yes, Christians will still be tempted, and yes, we will still sadly give in to temptation at times. But we don't enjoy sin like we used to. A change has happened.

Now we're convicted of sin. We want to leave it behind us, and we find that more and more our lives change. Never perfectly, never in a straight line.

Sometimes not always perceptible to us. Usually through the help of Christian brothers and sisters coming alongside of us. But over time, we do change.

How does this happen? What keeps us on the new path? What guards us from the old habits and the dark powers that lay behind them? John says, he who was born of God protects you.

[ 24 : 29 ] What a wonderful assurance. That is, Jesus, the living and risen King, the eternal Son of God, personally protects you.

He surrounds you with his sovereign might and his tender love, and he won't let anything harm you. Why? Because you, Christian, are his beloved.

Do you know the old hymn that we sing sometimes? The church's one foundation is Jesus Christ, her Lord. She is his new creation by water and the word.

Do you remember how the second half of that first verse goes? From heaven he came and sought her to be his holy bride. With his own blood he bought her, and for her life he died.

Friend, if that is true, surely he will keep on protecting you to the very end. Guarding you, keeping you, making sure you arrive safely home in the new heavens and new earth.

[ 25 : 41 ] So what is this confidence we have? What is this confidence that John wants to joyfully live out as we leave this letter? First, that God hears us. Second, that God protects us.

And third, that he gives us understanding of what's really real. We see this in verses 20 through 21. He gives us understanding of what's true, what's genuine, what's really real.

Let me read those last two verses for us again. And we know there's that note of confidence that John wants to leave us with. 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.

You see, the confidence that Christ brings isn't just about prayer or spiritual protection. It's about being in touch with what's true and genuine and real.

[ 26 : 51 ] We live in an age when it's hard to tell what's real, isn't it? You know, when you can fire up chat GPT and almost be led to think you're interacting with a real person. Perhaps it's getting harder than ever.

But spiritually speaking, counterfeits have always been around. There have always been idols masquerading as the real thing, promising power and happiness and love, but in the end, never able to deliver.

But Christ is different. He has come and given us understanding. Not just that we might know him who is true, but notice, John says, so that we might be in him who is true.

That's the promise of the gospel. Not just that we know what's real, but that we become more real ourselves. To be in him who is true.

true. You see, a deep principle of the spiritual life is that we become like what we worship. If we worship what's transient and fake, we will become transient and fake ourselves.

[ 28 : 05 ] If we worship a parody of the true God, we will become a parody of a true human. But Jesus Christ has come. And as John says, he is true God and eternal life.

In beholding Christ, we behold God in all his reality. And in beholding Christ, the true God, we become truly human, who we were created to be. Irenaeus, the church father, is sometimes quoted as saying, the glory of God is man fully alive.

In other words, when humanity is recovered from the fall and restored in dignity and beauty and living in the full flourishing that God intended, then we will see how glorious God truly is.

When his work of redemption is complete, then God's glory will be on display, not just as creator, but as redeemer. God is glorified in us when we are most alive in him.

God is glorified in us when we are in us when we are in us when we are in us when we are in us when we are in us when we are in us when we are in us. We must look to Christ. He is the true God and eternal life, and there are no substitutes and no rivals and none that compare.

[ 29 : 26 ] Everything else is a mere idol. That's why John ends his letter with that seemingly strange, but when you think about it, utterly fitting note. Little children, keep yourself from idols.

The whole letter, he's been trying to distinguish for them what's true and what's fake. And having exalted the true God in Jesus Christ, he says, now go forth and stay away from everything that's going to lead you from him, from all the cheap substitutes and facsimiles that this world offers.

So when we want to know what's real and what's lasting, we can have the deep assurance and confidence that when we look to Christ, we see it.

This is the assurance that we have in him, that looking to Christ, we see what's most real, what's most genuine, what's most permanent. And so, even if we find ourselves as Christians out of step with the world at times, we don't let that discourage us.

The kingdoms of this world are passing, friends. His kingdom is forever. It can't be shaken and it cannot fail. And fixing our eyes on him, we know that we will be heard when we pray, protected when we walk.

[ 30 : 50 ] But best of all, beholding the glory of the Lord, we are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.

For God who said, let light shine out of darkness, has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

That is the joyful assurance we have in him. That is the confidence of knowing Christ. And John says, go church, live it. Let's pray.

Father, we take a moment and just pause quietly before you, asking you to come by your spirit, speak to us what needs to be spoken, and work these truths down into the corners of our heart. And we humbly ask that you would give us this assurance, this confidence.

[ 32 : 17 ] We know that it is a gift from you. And you say that if human parents know how to give good gifts to their children, how much more will you, our Heavenly Father, give the Holy Spirit to those who ask?

Thank you. And that's a good joke.