

1 John 5:13-21 – Confidence in Christ's Finished Work

Exegetical Big Idea: Those who believe in Jesus can have confidence in eternal life in his name, that God hears them and is conforming them to his will, that Satan has no hold on them, and that Christ is the highest joy possible.

Homiletical Big Idea: **Authentic Christianity grows in confidence in the finished work of Christ.**

Fallen Condition Focus: The work of Satan in the world, the pull of sin in our lives, and the doubting moments of faith may cause the authentic Christian to lose heart. John writes with the purpose of giving the church confidence in the finished work of Christ.

Intro:

The past few months I've had the joy of coaching my girls in soccer. They are both in the under 5 division so coaching has been very interesting. We've largely been focussing on the very basics of soccer, things like using your feet to move the ball and not your hands, only playing inside the white lines, and which net to kick it in. I've found that the kids are generally pretty decent at following the ball around the field, but it's when they catch up to it they need to be reminded that you need to kick it. The kids played once a week for a few months, and the evening would last an hour. The first 30 minutes was spent with your own team doing drills and playing little games to learn the basics. The next 30 minutes you played against another team with whom you were sharing the field. Now technically, you're not supposed to keep score...But I do. I let my kids know when they win and when they lose. I want my kids to strive to win well and lose well. So before we play the other team, I tried to do a quick survey of how their kids were doing. I'd try and judge whether or not we'd have a chance at winning. Sometimes I'd look over and see some Goliath 5 year olds who looked like they'd been playing for years. Sometimes I'd look over and see that their team was just throwing grass at each other. We'd usually win those games. Either way, before each game, I'd bring the kids in for a huddle and give them a rousing encouraging speech. I'd let them know that we can do this, we're going to run fast and kick hard and we're going to score lots of goals. Why? Because I wanted them to face their opponents with confidence. It can be a scary thing for 3,4, or 5 year old to run in a group of other kids with parents and coaches shouting at them to kick the ball.

Confidence is a powerful thing. As Christians we're not up against a soccer team of 5 year olds, we're up against a lot more. John has been dealing in this letter with false teachers in the church leading people astray. He's been dealing with routing out sin in the lives of believers and has warned us about love for the world. He's been dealing with the need to love each other and treat each other as Christ has treated us. He's been dealing with false spirits and testing theology.

I don't know if God is going to give me one more day on this earth, let alone a year or 60 more. But when I look at the journey ahead I feel worn down and tired and already beaten.

Christians need confidence in the Christian walk. But unlike the confidence that I try to build up in my soccer team, our confidence cannot come from ourselves. We're up against a real enemy who is powerful and who wants our souls dragged with him into Hell. We are unable to bring ourselves into eternity and free ourselves from Satan's power. No our confidence for the Christian life must come from outside of us. It must come from no other place than the finished work of Christ. This is the sole basis of our confidence in life, and it is enough.

I think that's John's heart as he closes this letter to the churches in Ephesus. I think he wants them to know that:

Authentic Christianity grows in confidence in the finished work of Christ.

1) The finished work of Christ gives us the hope of eternal life (Verse 13)

John starts this last section off with a power statement of a current reality for Christians, but one that we must know more and more.

In verse 13 John directly addresses his Christian brothers and sisters when he writes "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God..." Now right there he is making the distinction between authentic Christians and the false teachers. By phrasing it this way he is reminding them that salvation is only found in faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ, something the false teachers were denying. They of course believed that you could be in relationship with God without recognizing Christ for who he was and what he did.

So it's important to understand here that he recognizes that his audience *already believes this*. So it may seem weird what he says next. He writes to these people who already believe this so that..."you may know that you have eternal life."

Well John, don't they already know that? Yes of course they do. John is not only wanting them to know factually that they have eternal life in Christ, he wants them to grow in their hope of this reality. He wants to their lives to be shaped by this reality.

[I remember when Alana and I were engaged and planning our wedding. We did the whole wedding registry thing, which if you're not familiar with it's basically like going to a store and making a list of all the things you'll need for your new married life. Our friends and family were extremely generous and bought us a ton of those items. Now before we were engaged I had already been living away from home, on my own for a number of years. I had accumulated a lot of household things necessary for life. I had dishes and cutlery, furniture, an old toaster and mini fridge, a single bed and all that. As it got closer to the wedding date we found an apartment that we were going to move into after the wedding and we started moving our things in. What do you think happened to my old single stuff? It all got donated. Why? Because of the certainty of the wedding day. I no longer had use for all my mismatched chipped plates and garage sale find toaster.]

This month's memory verse is Paul saying the same thing. Paul wants above all else to know Christ and the power of his resurrection. He had just said in the previous verses that whatever he previously considered to his profit, he now considers rubbish for the sake of knowing Christ.

We need this growing confidence in our eternal hope. I need to grow in confidence that Christ has paid it all, that I am reconciled to God, and that eternal life is mine both now and forevermore. If you are in Christ this morning, you need to know that as well.

Authentic Christianity grows in confidence in the finished work of Christ.

2) The finished work of Christ means we have access to God in prayer (Verses 14-17)

John has reassured his readers of their standing before God because of the work of Christ on the cross and his resurrection. He turns to an evidence of this restored relationship with God. As with any relationship, communion and communication are evidence of a good relationship. The same is true with God and his people. God hears our prayers.

Look at verses 14 with me. Blink and you'll miss a profound statement here. John has just told us that we are able to approach God. The entire Old Testament after the fall reminded humanity over and over again that because of our sin, we are unable to approach God. It was only through the sacrifice of Christ once and for all for the forgiveness of sins that we are even able to approach God! So why do we pray? Because we can!

Of course without our redemption through Christ, prayer is impossible! God is holy and we are not. Prayer is evidence that we are made holy, brought back into relationship with God. The Christian does not need to fear that God does not hear him or her. He does. Not because you have don't anything, but because Christ has.

Look at the glorious promise we have in prayer in verses 15-16. That if we ask anything according to God's will, he hears us, and we have what we have asked for! Now you are likely thinking "yes but I have asked for things before and have not received them". True, and we need to see here that will often be the case. Not because God is a liar, but because there is a qualifying statement in here. That statement is "according to his will".

God is not a genie that he would give us everything we want. Because guess what, my desires are too often contrary to the will of God. I think I need a Ferrari. I'm likely wrong. The purpose of prayer is not to get everything we want. The purpose of prayer is to conform our will to God's so that we will learn to love and ask for the things that God wants for us. This means growing in contentment with what we have, knowing that our heavenly Father holds back no good gift and only give us what is good for us. God desires to change our hearts and will so that we delight in the things that God delights in and our prayers reflect that.

[Every good parents knows that you cannot give a child everything they want. It is not good for the child. You know how many times I've gotten grape out from the fridge to feed my kids and they ask every time for me to *not* cut them. I don't know why they are obsessed with whole grapes but they for some reason always ask that I leave them whole. You know what the loving response is? "no, I am going to cut your grapes". Why? Because I delight in disappointing my children? No! Because I know, and want, what is best for them.]

Our heavenly Father, for our own good, wants to shape our prayers so that we ask according to his good will.

You know how I know I have a ways to go in this? Because when I think of prayer I too often primarily think of what I need. But it's very convicting what John writes next. In verse 16 "if anyone sees *a brother* commit a sin...he should pray".

Did you catch that? After writing about praying for things according to the will of God, John immediately writes about praying *for others*. And what is the content of our prayers for each other? That we would be rid of sin and given life.

Please don't misunderstand me, it's good to pray for each other's health. It's good to pray for each other's safety and wellbeing and that God would provide absolutely, but John's heart here is that first and foremost we would pray for each other that we would be free from sin!

Now the next few verses are some of the most debated verses in Scripture. John refers to a sin that leads to death, and suggests that it is not necessary to pray for that. He suggests that there is sin that leads to death and sin that does not lead to death. I am going to be honest and say I am not confident I know exactly what John is getting at.

There are two main way to look at this: One way is to see that John is talking to authentic believers here, and he has just told these believers that they currently have eternal life. So this death does not mean spiritual death but physical death. This may mean that John is indicating something like a Christian taking one's own life, and that we do not pray for that because we do not pray for the physically dead.

That's one way to look at it. The other way is to see that John is talking about those in the church who seem to be alive but are spiritually dead. For those people, who are not authentic Christians, their sin is leading to both physical and spiritual death. But for the authentic Christian, their sin, although unrighteous, is dealt with in Christ and therefore not leading to true death.

John may be suggesting that it's possible for a person to continually reject Christ and harden his or her heart to a point where God hands them over to their sin, and this is what John is saying it is not necessary to pray for.

I lean towards the second way to look at it because of what John goes into next, but before we look at that it's important to see the big picture. Whatever this sin is, let's not lose focus on the big picture. We need to be praying for each other's sanctification. May we pray that none of us here sin to a point that leads to death, physical or spiritual.

The will of God for you, in all that he does for you and to you, is to conform you into the image of Christ. It's God's will for you because that is what is best for you, and authentic Christians desire this most of all for themselves.

Pray that I am conformed into the image of Christ. I need this from you desperately. I am not like Christ as much as I should or can be, or want to be. If you have one prayer for me, pray that I may be more like my saviour. It is my prayer for you, that you too would be more like Jesus.

Slow process, and often I don't see it happening as quickly as I want it to. Don't give up praying for each other that we would be more like Christ. Let our prayers contain thanks to God that he began a good work in each and every Christian and that he will carry it on to completion unto the day of Christ Jesus.

Authentic Christianity grows in confidence in the finished work of Christ.

We know we can have confidence in this because of the promise that comes next.

3) The finished work of Christ means victory over Satan and his work. (Verses 18-20a)

We know we can have confidence that God will complete his work in us because of what comes next. Look at verse 18. We've heard this before in John's letter back in chapter 3. John is not saying Christians never sin, but he is saying that Christians don't live in sin. Authentic Christians are fighting against sin, rather than letting it fester in their hearts. And the reason for this is found in the same verse. The "one who is born of God" that's Jesus, keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him.

Literally the words here is that because of Christ's keeping the Christian, Satan cannot "touch him".

The presence of sin is still there in the life of the Christian, but because of the finished work of Christ sin will not be victorious. If it is the work of God to make you into his image, it is the work of Satan to make you into his. Thank God the Christian is kept safe by Christ!

[I can't help but think of the picture of a rocky shoreline. The clouds are dark and the wind is strong and so there are massive waves just pounding these jagged rocks. The waves are huge and non-stop just crashing with powerful force against these rocks. I can picture debris of boats that have been caught in the wave and crashed and sank on the rocks. My thoughts when I think of that scene is how I would not survive being down on those rocks. The waves are too powerful and I am too weak. Being at the mercy of those waves on those rocks means my certain death. But now picture yourself not down in the rocks, but on the shore overlooking all of it. You can see the waves and hear the crashing but you are on the other side of the great boundary of the shoreline. The waves can crash all day and night with all the power they can muster but you cannot be touched by them because you are kept safe by the shoreline.]

Satan is a power in this world. John calls Satan the ruler of this world. We see his works all around us. But he cannot touch you if you belong to Christ. We often think of protection against Satan here as physical, and certainly that's true, but John has something even more significant here. John means here that Satan has no right to your soul if you belong to Christ. You are standing safely behind the great protection and boundary of Christ, where Satan has no dominion.

Are you safely hidden in Christ? Because if not, you are blinded by him and down in those rocks where you will be destroyed. Under the sovereignty of God, Satan has dominion in this world to lead people into sin and rebellion against God. John says in verse 19 that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. We see Satan's work in our world! We know this to be true. We just finished going through a whole month in our culture where we celebrate rebellion against God's good design for marriage, and who we are as male and female made in his image. Ironically we call this "pride" month. In fact is a month of deep shame for our culture. You may have heard of recent events in the USA in their highest court concerning abortion. Although this doesn't outright ban abortion, and my prayer is that one day we will see that, but it nonetheless will save millions of lives. The reaction of countless people who are outraged at the saving of lives is unbelievable. Satan truly has dominion in this world under the sovereignty of God.

These are just a few examples of how Satan has blinded the world and has led them into rebellion against God.

But thanks be to God that there is salvation from this. Look at verse 20 with me. Christ has come to lift the veil and to take off the blinders. For those who would humble themselves before God and ask him to see the truth, Christ *gives* understanding, *so that* we may know him who is true. That is God.

If you have not done that, you need to today. Ask God for understanding and faith so that you would know him who is true, and be in him who is true. The finished work of Christ is for you as well, if you would have it. Satan need not be victorious over you. Come to Christ who keeps you so that the wave cannot touch you.

Yes it is true that we still see the waves, but never will they touch you because the One born of God keeps you safe.

Authentic Christianity grows in confidence in the finished work of Christ.

4) The finished work of Christ means he is our highest glory and affection. (Verses 20b-21)

Now look at this very last verse with me. At first I admit it seems out of place. John does not end his letter with a goodbye, or further greetings, just “dear children, keep yourselves from idols.”

This is far from out of place though. The thought I think starts in the previous verse when he writes “He is the true God and eternal life”. If God is the true and only God as we know from Scripture, then idols have no place in the Christian heart. It is Jesus, and nothing else that is the centre of Christianity.

The concept of idols seems foreign to us today. At least the concept of little golden statues that are prayed to and bowed down to. But there were no atheists in the ancient world, only a countless number of “gods” to choose from. The temptation to fit in with society, and not just to be accepted but to be able to work and shop and even be spared from persecution as a Christian was huge.

We may not have little golden status, but we have idols. Idols are the things apart from God that we have a higher affection for. John writes that we are to literally “guard ourselves” from these things. There are countless things that are fighting for our highest affection and joy, but all of these have one thing in common, they rob our satisfaction of Christ.

[For the first time in my life this year I had a cavity fixed. Kids, do you know what a cavity is? It’s when food get stuck in between your teeth and you can’t get it out. Usually it happens when you don’t brush properly or enough or if you don’t floss. The food sits in youth tooth and it’s gross, but it starts to rot. It starts to rot your teeth! Eventually it breaks down your teeth enough so that it starts to hurt. Eventually it hurts so bad that you can’t use those teeth to chew any food! Imagine for a minute that you just let that food stay between your teeth, what’s going to happen? All your teeth are going to rot and hurt! If all your teeth hurt, and you can’t eat food...do you see a problem here? Now imagine it’s your birthday and your parents have made your favourite meal. But you can’t enjoy it can you? Is the meal super awesome and super tasty? YES! It still is, but you can’t enjoy it.

Affection for ungodly things is like a horrible tooth rot. Loving sin is like letting it sit in your heart and it rots your heart. After a while, you can’t enjoy the good things that God wants for you! After a while you do not *want* to enjoy Christ.

Chasing after other affections steals our joy for Christ. And here’s the problem with that, there is no greater satisfaction than Christ.

May we set apart Christ as our highest affection and glory. May we guard this.

You know what I want most for each and every one of you, that you are so obsessed with the glory of Jesus everything else in the world is dwarfed by that. That you are so obsessed with loving the things

July 3, 2022

that God loves that sin makes you sick. I want that for you, I want you to want that for me, and I want us to want that for each other.

We must have confidence in the finished work of Christ, and we must have overflowing and unending JOY in the finished work of Christ. Because we are his, and he is ours.

Authentic Christianity grows in confidence, and joy, in the finished work of Christ.