

(1 John #21) New Horizons

by J. Glyn Owen

J. Glyn Owen's sermon emphasizes the importance of Christian assurance and its transformative effects on our relationship with God and prayer life.

Duration: 40:25

Scripture: 1 John 3:19

Topics: "Assurance Of Faith", "Ministry And Service"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the passage from 1 John 3:19-21. The sermon begins by discussing the cure for a heart that falsely condemns, emphasizing the importance of reassurance and confidence in God. The preacher then moves on to the concept of new horizons, urging the congregation to see the new possibilities and blessings that God has in store for them. The sermon concludes with a call to action, encouraging believers to use their assurance in God to not only enjoy personal luxury but also to exercise a ministry that proves God's reality to others.

Transcript

Let us spend a moment in prayer before God. Let us pray. Inasmuch, our Lord, as we can neither read thy word nor write, nor understand it, let alone apply it to our own hearts and lives, without the aid of thy Spirit, we cry now, as children in need, come, O Spirit of God, among us afresh, and let this holy word of thine become alive to us, and meaningful and relevant and vital, bringing us into the fullness of thy purposes for us at this hour, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen. We have come in our studies in the first epistle of John to the paragraph that begins with verse 19 in chapter 3. And last Lord's Day morning we were thinking particularly of verses 19 and 20. We took the theme, the cure for a heart that falsely condemns.

And perhaps it might be helpful if we just read those verses again, because they're so intimately related to what we have before us today. Hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure or reassure our hearts before him. For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.

And now today we take up the thread with verse 21. We've entitled this New Horizons. Here it is.

Let us read these four verses together. Beloved, says John, If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God, and whatsoever we ask we receive of him, because we keep his commandments

and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. And this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another as he gave us commandment.

And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us by the spirit which he hath given to us. We turn this morning then from the cure for a heart that falsely condemns, to the consequences of a heart being divinely assured.

If our heart is assured before God, and we know something of the meaning of Christian assurance, then there are certain new horizons that open up to us that never did before. The doctrine of Christian assurance is infinitely precious. There can be no computation of the value and the wealth of this tremendous experience that the Bible holds out to the Lord's people.

The privilege of being assured before God that we are his people, and because we are his people that we have a right to plead his promises. Because we are his people we may think of him and live before him as one who is indeed our God and our Father. And we may expect of him that he should act in accordance with his word and his promises and his covenant.

Now this is Christian assurance. It is exceedingly precious to know this. And should there be among us today those who do not, may I suggest to you that really this deserves to be the main quest of a person's life.

Search the scriptures and search them prayerfully and seek the Lord through the scriptures because this is indeed one of his covenant promises to those who trust in his Son and obey his word. But now very remarkable, that benefit, great as it is, is not what John is majoring upon in our text today. He is telling us that if we are assured before God then there is something even more precious than that for us.

There is something beyond mere assurance or reassurance. And it is to this that we come today. Let me just read again.

If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence before God and whatsoever we ask we receive of him because we keep his commandments and we do those things that are pleasing in his sight. New horizons indeed. The consequences of a heart divinely assured.

Now no less than three things invite our attention here this morning. The first is this. John is first of all speaking of a condition of being where there is no longer any confusion, no confusion of uncertainty within the soul.

Look at that verse 21 again. It reads in the RSV in this way. Beloved, if our heart do not condemn us, we have confidence before God.

If our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence. The absence of confusion within oneself. The tragedy of being uncertain of God or uncertain of ourselves in our relation to God is that we're always confused.

We never know the way we're going. And the uncertain man cannot do great service for God. In prayer if a man is uncertain, as we shall see in a moment, there are limits to what he can ask with faith.

He can say his prayers but he can't pray them with expectation. There's a world of difference between saying your prayers and praying them. The Bible never tells us to say our prayers but to pray them.

But we can't pray with the expectation of faith if we have no assurance. Neither indeed can we evangelize if we have no assurance. In vain do we go out and seek to win men and women for Jesus Christ if we are not sure that he receives us when we come.

Did he receive us? Are we sure? Did he pardon our sins? Are we certain? Has he brought us into the family of God? Are we sure of that? If we are not certain of things in our own souls, then we're always in a confused state. And one could proceed at great lengths along those lines. But now, says John, this has come to an end.

With assurance, we come to a state of things where there is an absence of inward confusion. We have confidence before God. If our heart do not condemn us, we have confidence.

I wonder, my friends, what our condition is this morning. I am thinking especially of the first part of that verse. And I want to stress it again, if I may.

Not until our hearts cease to condemn us do we really get away from the condition of inner confusion and commotion which is necessary as the springboard of genuinely God-honoring Christian activity of any kind. As we indicated last time, if the Holy Spirit is convicting us of sin, therefore, there is only one thing to do. Let's acknowledge it.

Let's plead guilty before God. Let us acknowledge what God is convincing us of and let us come with penitence to the fount where sin is washed away. Let us accept the promises that if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and even to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Let us do that. If, on the other hand, our conscience is a little bit morbid and it's out of tune and it's overworking and it's not rightly attuned to the will and the purposes of God and we can never feel happy about anything, well, let's come back to the test that we saw and considered last Lord's Day morning. It's a very sad state of affairs where people even question whether they've repented enough, whether they've got enough faith to be served, whether they do anything sufficiently.

I remember spending months, literally months, two or three times a week with a certain family and they were all in this particular condition. When it came to the command of Scripture to repent, yes, we repent, but have we repented enough? Then they looked at the command to believe and to obey. Do we believe enough? Are we obedient enough? Now, John brings us to the point, he says, look, don't let your conscience confuse you because God is greater than your conscience.

And God says this, if you love the brethren, that's the implication of what we've seen before, I'm bringing it out again, if you really love the people of God as the people of God, not because they dress in a certain way, not because they belong to a certain class in society, not because they're of a certain color, not because they're of a certain background, but because they are the people of God. If you love them just because they're the Lord's people, and you love them in this sense, that when you see a brother in need, you don't shut up your bowels of compassion, as the King James Version puts it, but you come alongside of the brother in need and you say, I'm a brother of yours. What's your problem? Can I help? Then, says John, you may know that you are of the truth, of the truth.

Don't worry what your conscience says to you anymore, if your conscience is out of gear, God is greater than your conscience. And God says this, now this is very precious for some people, the absence of confusion, oh blessed condition. It may not prove that we are on the highest scale of maturity, but it

certainly proves our pedigree as the people of God, as the children of the King.

And that's the first thing that John envisages here, the absence of confusion within oneself. My good friend, I trust if you don't know what this means as you come to the house of God today, you will before you leave. Take God at His word.

But now, the next thing is this, the presence of confidence before God. You notice we are moving away now from the absence of confusion within ourselves to the presence of confidence before God. We have confidence before God.

Now let's examine this in a little more detail. Let's look first of all at the substance of the boon that is referred to here, this confidence. Christian assurance is no mere negative.

It's no negative benefit. It is not simply the absence of doubt, fear, uncertainty, or of an accusing conscience. On the contrary, it is a vitally positive factor.

And John expounds it as such in this context. Now, the word that John employs for confidence really means openness, openness of heart. It means that kind of openness of heart in which you find absolute freedom to speak.

Now, can I illustrate it by contrast? Perhaps you go to a doctor's office in fear and trembling. He examines you, and you know what happens. You sometimes get dry in the mouth.

You're afraid to speak of the symptoms that you know so well. You know, you really lose your powers of speech. There are other circumstances.

I could enumerate quite a few this morning. I don't think there's any point in doing it. But you know there are situations in life where really you can't speak.

You just lose your powers of speech. Now, this is the exact opposite. There are other situations where you can feel absolutely free, uninhibited, and you can just speak up and speak out and say exactly what you want to say and what you ought to say.

And that's what this word confidence means. C. H. Dodd says that the word referred to by John here originally had reference to a person's most basic right within his own community, his own society, to speak his own mind about any subject. Freedom of speech.

Whereas its connotation later widens, says C. H. Dodd, there always hung to it the special association with the thought of freedom of speech, unhampered by fear or by shame. So then, this is what the word basically means. Confidence means the ability to speak clearly, freely, openly.

But now, this openness of which it speaks is not to be confused with brazenness or with impudence. Now, there is a kind of openness which is nothing other than insolence, arrogance, impertinence, shamelessness, where people blurt out something that it would be far better if they kept in, inside somewhere under lock and key. We intrude into other people's affairs with our words when it would be better that we should keep to ourselves our unwise and sometimes unloving thoughts.

Now, John's not thinking of that. Not the kind of openness that somebody claimed in my presence not all that long ago by saying that she had been given the gift of discernment and could sum up a situation just like that and always had the word for it. Everybody else didn't agree, but she thought so.

And that's not the openness and the freedom of speech that John is speaking of. This is not impertinence. This is not arrogance.

It's something quite different. What John has in mind is the openness of a child who has never had occasion to lose confidence in its father or mother. There is nothing more beautiful in the whole world than this.

Now, you parents, perhaps your children have left the hearth a long time ago, but you know what it is. You know, Johnny or whatever her name is comes running in and says exactly what's happened and how it happened. And when that continues for a few years, perhaps into teen life you know, it's a most precious thing.

The feeling that I can tell mummy, I can tell daddy, I can open up, I don't need to hide anything. There's nothing I need put in the drawer or in the cubicle. Nothing I need cover over.

Right out it comes. You know, that's wonderful. That's what John is speaking of.

Confidence before God. Knowing that I can tell him everything. That's the substance of the boon.

John expresses here the sphere of its benefit by saying, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence before God. He wants to bring that out. You see, our dealings in prayer, as he's going to say in a moment, are essentially before God.

Right then, we need to have this confidence that remains in the presence of God. We can have confidence before men. Some of us can bluff people.

And we can put on a show and men don't know any difference. They think we're all right. And we can get away with it sometimes.

Not always. Even men may find us out from time to time that this is confidence before God. All things are naked and open before Him with whom we have to do.

Nevertheless, says John, there is the possibility of this experience of real confidence before God. My conscience that doesn't work properly may accuse me. But God knows all things and God listens to everything I say.

And I can tell him everything. Now mark the contention itself. For it is in the covenant for every child of God there is the conscious presence of the almighty God here.

God in His holiness, God in His righteousness, God in His wisdom, God in His greatness, God in His infinity. And yet the child can come into His presence and be free to say everything. And this is what John is speaking about.

When we have learnt from the word of God how to deal with sin and how also to deal with a morbidly nagging conscience, this is the privilege that awaits us. Confidence before God. There are two things then.

The absence of confusion within oneself and then the presence of confidence in the presence of God. And you know, I believe that if we only had that much to say and if John only said that much to us this morning from his word, it certainly would be something for which we should praise God. But there is always this exciting element about Scripture.

You know, that's only the stage set for something that goes even beyond this. All this, says John, all this opens up a new era and a new dimension of living. And he puts it like this in verse 22.

The end of verse 21 and on into verse 22. We have confidence before him and whatsoever we ask we receive of him because we keep his commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. I want to speak of this third feature here as an active commerce with God.

Now, I'm not bringing in this third C just because they go together. I think that commerce is the right word here. I deliberately employ it because its dictionary meaning is this.

The exchange of materials or products. And this is exactly what John envisages here. The exchange of products between the praying man and the listening God.

The man brings his petition before God. Here he is, envisaged in this context, he's talking freely to God. He's opening up, hiding nothing, child talking to father.

And in all the liberty, the unconfused state of that glorious blood-bought privilege, he comes to the end of talking with God and he begins to pray. And he asks, notice, he moves from speaking to God and now his speaking takes on a particular turn. He asks.

He offers the petition or the request to God and God gives him what he asks. This is commerce. Now, the dimension of experience envisaged here is something which I believe will challenge all of us this morning because, unfortunately, Christian people generally have ceased to realize that this kind of dimension is within the reach of every child of God.

The apostle is thinking of the actual experience of communion with God and confidence in him whereby specific things are sought by name and received. Sought from God and received from him. Nothing less than real and effectual commerce with heaven.

Now, of course, prayer is much more than this, taken generally, using the word prayer now in its most comprehensive sense. Prayer involves, I suppose, in the first place, adoration. In this general sense it begins with an appreciation and an adoration of God in his glory.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God the Creator and God the Redeemer. Of the person of God and of God in his activities.

In all things, especially in his grace in Jesus Christ. Prayer is essentially the outgoings of the soul in adoration and in worship. Prayer goes beyond that.

Prayer is confession. Or should we say that confession is part of prayer. The acknowledgement of our sin.

The acknowledgement of our awareness that things are wrong when we come into the presence of God. And the acceptance of responsibility for the things that are wrong and then putting them right, seeking forgiveness, seeking pardon and cleansing and so forth. All this is part of prayer and much else.

Intercession, asking for people in distant places as well as near at hand. And then the rededication of oneself. Prayer should never come to an end without our placing ourselves afresh at the mercy and at the disposal of God.

But this is essentially a part of prayer. It's petition. It's asking for something tangible, real.

Calling a spade a spade. I know what I need and I just don't continue to talk about it or think about it. But in the presence of God, now that I have confidence before him and I can speak freely, I say, Father, please give me this.

Now my friends, how many of us are living on that level? You see, when we talk about worship and about adoration and about confession, you have no certainty that you're being heard. We can go through these other aspects of prayer and the prayers are outgoing, but you and I are not sure that they're arriving. There are multitudes of men and women in the Christian church this morning who are not sure that God is a prayer answering God.

But in petition, you learn that. Petition means commerce, asking, receiving, pleading, getting. Now, here I would just like to interject.

Of course, one could illustrate from one era of church life or another, but what I want to ask you to do and urge you to do, my good people, is to read the Bible in this light and see the men of God from Genesis right through to Revelation, besieging the throne of God and asking and receiving. And not only that, of course, we can turn to a whole wealth of Christian literature, biographies and autobiographies. If time permitted, I would like to point this morning to Robert Murray MacChain, who's one of my great friends, bringing heavenly blessing to the parched needs of Scotland in his day, with his tears having dug literally a hole in his desk as he prayed for his country.

And he brought God down into the situation. See Murray MacChain there. See a man not as well known, perhaps, but a man who did something mighty for God in the west of England, Billy Bray, who called himself the King's Son, one of the quaintest of men in his day.

I suppose that reading the life of Billy Bray meant something more to me than reading many another biography. As I watched this man of God, very simple man, walking down into the Cornwall and moving around the countryside and praying, Lord, which village shall I claim for you? What families shall I pray into the kingdom today? And he would pass by one village and another until the Spirit of God would come upon him and he would know in his heart, this is the village or this is the town. And Billy would begin to pray.

And he would go literally on his knees around the village and he would bring every family, every father, every mother, every grandmother, grandfather, grandson, granddaughter. He would bring the whole community before God, perhaps for six months. Then he would have liberty in his soul to go in and he claimed them for God.

And he did. That's where the Methodist churches of the west of Cornwall have sprung from. Fundamentally from the prayers of Billy Bray and some of those that gathered around him.

Of course, everybody knows of George Muller, how he built and sustained his orphanages. It was sheer prayer, asking and receiving, doing commerce with heaven. Not just throwing petitions out into the open and forgetting about them, but out of confidence in God and before God, asking and receiving.

And so we could go on to David Brainerd and we could easily cross the Atlantic and stay here a long time. But you see, this is a principle enunciated in Scripture for all the people of God. John is not thinking by the way of a mere isolated answer to prayer.

He is thinking of this as a consistent order of life. Life goes on in this way. A constant confidence before God and a constant asking and receiving.

The dimension of experience envisaged here and then the condition of such experience explained. John tells us all this is explained in so far as we can understand it. We receive these things from him, he says.

We receive from him whatever we ask because we keep his commandments and we do what pleases him. Now something must be distinguished here. Not only must it be distinguished here, but we must always distinguish between two things in Scripture.

We must particularly distinguish very clearly between the meritorious cause of something and the conditions of its possession. Now the meritorious cause for answers to prayer, for God hearing us and receiving us and sending us what we ask, the meritorious cause is not in us. The meritorious cause is in the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ offered on the cross of Calvary.

He died for this. And he rose again for this. And he deserves this.

And it's because he has deserved it and he has procured this right for us. This is the cause, this is the source whence this kind of thing is possible. But over and above that, God says, now look here, it's all going to be out of grace.

It's because Christ died, but before you can enter into it, you have to prove yourself. And you have to prove yourself fundamentally in one way, by doing the things that please me. By using what I give you.

If I give you something, using it not for your own glory, but for my glory. And that's why you must prove yourself by keeping my commandments. You see, this is all it means to keep the commandments of the Lord.

It's just to show that we please him. We can put a very grim face on the commandments of God, you know. But fundamentally this is exactly what they mean.

Every solitary one of the abiding commandments of the Old Testament and of the New. They simply mean this. This is what pleases God.

And his people who are going to do commerce with him must learn to please him. Now you see, this means that there's no real problem for a man in this order. Even if there is no known commandment as to what he's going to do.

I'm in a situation and I read the Bible and I don't find a specific commandment which tells me how I ought to behave. But I want to please God. And if I want to please God, that's all I need.

In the light of the commandments that I know. In the light of the books that I read and digest and live by. Now I will assess what pleases him.

Very well, says John. If you do that, the confidence that you have before God is such that will enable you to ask and to receive. Not because you merit it.

The merit is in another. But you keep the conditions and you prove yourself. There are two statements in the gospel written by John which I want to bring together and I'm drawing to a close.

I would like you to notice them when you go away. The one is in John 8, 29. And the other is in John 11, verses 41 and 42.

In John 8 and 49, Jesus says this. I always do the things that please him. That is my father.

Now that's a categorical statement. It's a statement of intent. It's an acknowledgement of the principle that governs his life.

I always do the things that please him. What does he say in John 11, verses 41 and 42? Well, he's praying concerning the work that he's going to do in relation to Lazarus who has been buried. He's coming to the graveside of Lazarus and he's praying aloud.

And he says this. I've asked this of you, Father, just for the people around me to hear me asking. I know, he says, that thou hearest me always.

But for their sake, I'm asking it aloud. Have you got it? He always did the things that pleased the Father. He always knew that the Father heard and answered his prayer.

And he's the pattern man. In principle, then, there is one thing that God asks of us, and that is to please him. But in pleasing him, we must express it by keeping his commandment and especially to keep on believing on the name of his Son and to keep on loving one another.

Those who are thus loyal to him, John says, abide in him. Nothing comes between, like the branch in the vine. Surely John has the fifteenth chapter of his gospel in mind here.

Those who live on this kind of level, says John, abide in him and he in them. And out of that abiding communion with the Lord Jesus and with the Father, they can ask, according to John 15 and verse 7, what they will. And it shall be done.

There is an authority that is given to the man who has learned to dwell in the secret place of the Most High. Brethren, it's a very challenging thing that came again from Scotland, a statement from Murray Machen. What a man or a woman is in prayer, that he or she is.

And nothing more, nothing more. I believe that the Spirit of God is urging you and urging me this morning to see this new vista that is open. Not for some people, thanks be to God, for those whom we recognize to be ahead of us in these things.

Glory be to God for them. But my friends, this is something for me, this is something for you, this is something for all of us together. The cure for a heart that falsely condemns the consequences of a heart being divinely assured.

Absence of confusion, presence of confidence, engagement in commerce with the throne of God, with a government of heaven, with a God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Are you assured? Are you using your assurance simply for personal luxury, enjoying it, but no more? Or are you standing in that place of assurance and exercising a ministry whereby you prove to those who know you at all that God is real and God is yours? He hears and answers prayer. O Lord, teach me to pray.

Teach me to pray the gospel way, asking and receiving. Heavenly Father, we bow, acknowledging first of all the challenge of this kind of passage upon which we have been meditating this morning. Because it surely shows us up as being far away from the sweet communion with thyself, wherein we are meant to

exercise the kind of ministry delineated here.

Because this is so, we know that even if we do not consciously sin and break the commandments, we are guilty of withholding blessing and of keeping back the praises of men who, if they knew thee to be a God such as this, might still list thy praise. O mighty God, lead us in the way of obedience and enable us to serve thee in our day to thy glory. Through Jesus Christ our Savior.

Amen.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/4/SID4822.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/j-glyn-owen/1-john-21-new-horizons/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net