

ASSURANCE AND BOLDNESS
(SUNDAY, MARCH 10, 2019)

Scripture: Exodus 33; 1 John 5:13-15

INTRODUCTION

I have heard in the past of churches where few partake of the Lord's Supper either out of a sense of unworthiness or lack of assurance.

On the other hand, I am sure that there are churches where assurance is not even an issue, because sin, holiness, and discipleship are never discussed. Everyone is just happy.

The assurance that we need and that we should seek is not merely outward happiness or material prosperity.

The assurance that we need is that which is based on the certainty of the gospel and its application to sinners.

The theme of assurance was very important at the time of the Reformation.

It was so important because of the confusing message that Rome teaches on the subject.

Rome teaches a message both of grace and meritorious human works.

Rome will say that salvation is by grace and also declare that eternal life is a reward for the obedient.¹ This is a confusing message at best.

Listen to the opening section of the WCF on Assurance of Grace and Salvation.

18.1. Although hypocrites and other unregenerate men may vainly deceive themselves with false hopes and carnal presumptions of being in the favor of God, and estate of salvation (which hope of theirs shall perish): yet such as truly believe in the Lord Jesus, and love Him in sincerity, endeavouring to walk in all good conscience before Him, may, in this life, **be certainly assured that they are in the state**

¹ <https://www.christianpost.com/news/can-catholics-have-the-assurance-of-salvation.html>

of grace, and may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, which hope shall never make them ashamed.

This statement of the WCF is a good summary of what the Apostle John has been writing in this letter.

There are hypocrites and others who have false hopes.

But to those who truly believe in the Lord Jesus and love Him in sincerity, John writes so that we may know with assurance that we have eternal life.

And as we will see this assurance is connected with prayer.

In three verses, John beautifully brings together assurance of God's grace and boldness and assurance in prayer.

God grants assurance to His true children of eternal life so that you will seek Him boldly in prayer and have true assurance and peace that He hears your prayers.

We will look at verses 13-15 in two parts:

- (1) Verse 13 – That you may know
- (2) Verses 14-15 – Boldness and assurance in prayer

1) THAT YOU MAY KNOW, v. 13

Outlines of John's first letter as I have pointed out are not all the same nor are they inspired.

It is pretty obvious as you look at this book that we are coming to the end.

We are looking at verses 13-15 which according to an old division of this letter are the final verses of the **sixth** section of this letter.

This leaves just six verses for the seventh and final section of the book.

MacArthur in his study Bible helpfully observes that John ends his letter with a discussion of five Christian certainties.

The verb *to know* is used seven times in verses 13-21.²

In verses 13-15, two of these five certainties are presented, assurance of eternal life and our boldness and assurance in prayer.

Verse 13 begins with the words, **these things I have written**, which could look back to verses 6-12 in particular, but more likely I think John is giving a summary for the entire book.

Throughout this book, John has been giving testimony to the glorious truth of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Also in verse 13 we see one of the reasons why John has written his letter: **that you may know that you have eternal life.**

Let's consider two other passages in 1 John that also express the purpose for John writing this letter.

1John 1:4 And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.

1John 2:1 My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

What we can say is that John is writing this letter to believers. This is not a surprise.

Now, it is certainly the case that not everyone who is part of a church is regenerate or elect.

But we can say that John's letter unlike the gospel is not primarily evangelistic but written to those who have already been brought to saving faith.³

Listen to John 20:30-31.

John 20:30 And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; **31** but these are written that **you may believe** that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

² *MacArthur Study Bible*

³ John R. W. Stott, *The Letter of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC 19; IVP/ Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 184.

These words are similar but different to what is described in verse 1 John 5:13.

This letter is written to those who already believe so that they know that they have eternal life.

In this short letter, John speaks many times about knowing.

Two different verbs are used that both can be translated as *to know*. These two verbs are used at least **42 times** in this letter.

The verb translated as you may know in verse 13 **means a settled state of awareness or a grounded conviction.**⁴

This knowing is not based on what we see or figure out but based on the glorious truth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Now John has talked much about the place of love and obedience.

This letter is filled with the call to keep God's commandments and demonstrate true love for others, not just in word but in deed and truth.

But it is most significant that John stresses here what we know as the doctrine of *sola fide*.

We are not saved as we partner with God. No, God has shown undeserved mercy and grace to lost and ruined sinners who could do nothing to merit God's favor.

Sinners cannot work their way up to God.

Through God's work of regeneration sinners can believe and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

True love and obedience flow from true faith rather than being the means of arriving at saving faith.

Now, we have heard this many, many times, thankfully.

But Robert Yarbrough notes how a message of works-righteousness started to be taught as early as the second century and maybe even earlier.

⁴ Yarbrough, 299.

Yarbrough mentions an early writing called 2 Clement that is suffused with an air of works-righteousness.⁵

Certainly, one of Satan's strategies is to encourage churches to preach doctrines that emphasize man's obedience over the work of Jesus Christ.

Never do we want to become comfortable with sin. We don't sin so that grace may abound!

But our assurance can never rest in our own efforts.

John Calvin wrote:

It is therefore the duty of a godly teacher, in order to confirm disciples in the faith, to extol as much as possible the grace of Christ, so that being satisfied with that, we may seek nothing else.

I have stated a number of times what I think is a helpful way of understanding the relationship of faith and works.

Imagine standing before God on the day of judgment and trying to say, Lord, you know that I have tried to live a good life. I have given help to the poor and needy. I have prayed. I have tried to witness for you and serve in my church. I have been good to my children.

These actions along with what Christ did really should count as earning eternal life.

Would you ever dare try to compare your own efforts and attempts with the perfect life of Christ and His death on the cross?

Would you ever dare say, while Jesus did 99% of the work, I did the last 1%?

How foolish.

How ridiculous to think that good works and valiant efforts could be every compared to the perfect work of Christ.

But one trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ alone for salvation should say, Lord, I have sincerely tried to serve you. My works could never atone for any of my sins. It is the blood and

⁵ Yarbrough, 297.

righteousness of Christ that cover me and that have saved me. My works only bear witness to your sovereign grace and my faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and my thankfulness for His work.

For example, Paul did speak of his zeal in serving Christ.

Col. 1:29 To this *end* I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.

1Cor. 15:10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God *which was with me*.

But is there any single passage in Scripture where Paul or Peter or John ever would say, because of my labor I know that God will grant eternal life to me?

Not one!

Gal. 6:14 But God forbid that I should **boast** except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

And we know well the precious verses from Ephesians 2:8-9.

Eph. 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is the gift of God, 9* not of works, lest anyone should boast.

So yes, obedience is vital for the Christian life as part of the response.

But as John correctly describes here, the assurance is for those who believe.

And it is not just believing. It is believing in the name of the Son of God.

And this believing is not just a one-time event but the continued trust and response of the believer to God's saving grace.

Our assurance is Christ and what He has done and what He continues to do for us.

Rom. 8:33 Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? *It is* God who justifies. **34** Who *is* he who condemns? *It is* Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.

Now it is appropriate to ask the question, why does John speak of assurance at the end of this letter?

We can say for at least two reasons.

First, assurance is part of the theme of this entire letter.

We have assurance that the Son of God did truly come to earth and that He died for sinners and satisfied God's wrath.

Second, John might be emphasizing assurance because of the false teachers and those who were causing trouble for John's first readers.

1John 2:19 They went out from us, **but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us;** but *they went out* that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.

It is very important to have confidence that believing the truth of the gospel is not in vain. It is not just a psychological trick to help us feel better about ourselves.

On Christ all your confidence must be found!

2) BOLDNESS AND ASSURANCE IN PRAYER, vv. 14-15

Whatever the outline, we can say that verses 14-15 connect closely with the previous verse.

In verse 14 John uses one of my favorite words, confidence or boldness.

This word is used 4 times in this letter. Three time it is translated as confidence and one time as boldness.

1John 4:17 ¶ Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have **boldness** in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world.

Either confidence or boldness are good translations.

Now in this letter, John speaks both of the confidence that we can have in considering the awesome Day of Judgment and also the present confidence or boldness that we can have as we go to God in prayer.

Now this is also not the first time that John has spoken of prayer in this short letter. Look back to 1 John 3:22.

John must speak again of prayer here because it is important, and it connects with the theme of assurance.

Now to appreciate what John says here we must do our best to understand what an incredible gift it is for us to be able to boldly cry out to God.

How insignificant we are before the God who has created all things, who sustains all things, who has no need for anything, and because of His work of salvation we vile sinners are able to have true fellowship with the living God.

And this fellowship is not one where we come like Esther before King Ahasuerus.

Remember in the story of Esther how coming before the king without an invitation could have meant her death?

We are told by John that we can come boldly, with confidence.

One older commentator wrote:

Prayer is the most direct expression of faith, because prayerfully turning our thoughts and will to God is the initial step from thought about God to full assurance of God. By the same token prayer is the most direct expression of love. It is an offering of highest priority, since the first thing we owe God is our thinking and willing.

I loved studying these verses this past week. They are so rich. Let me summarize them, because our time is limited.

First, John speaks of boldness or confidence that we have that God will hear us.

Second, John does describe that we can ask anything, but it must in line with His will.

Third, these two truths lead to knowing that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

Robert Yarbrough, one of my teachers at Trinity, has written an excellent commentary on 1-3 John that I have mentioned a number of times.

I found his comments on these verses some of the best in the entire book.

He deals with the question of how do we understand John's very generous language when based on our own experience we know that God is not our butler and that we simply don't get everything that we pray for?

Is it if we only have enough faith we will get what we pray for almost like the prosperity gospel preachers proclaim?

That can't be the answer.

Think of examples in Scripture of prayers that were not directly answered as the petitioner prayed.

Listen to a summary.

Moses prayed for rebellious people's sins to be forgiven, but God refused (Exod. 32:31-35). He turned down Moses's request to cross the Jordan (Deut. 3:23-27). Prayers offered under certain auspices are detestable (Prov. 28:9; cf. 15:8, 29) and obviously not granted. God ignores presumptuous prayers when they are lifted up with unclean hands (Isa. 1:15). There are times when God's people cry out and he refuses to answer (Mic. 3:4; Jer. 11:11). Divine wisdom even laughs at their calamity when they cry out to him (Prov. 1:26, 28). However adamantly they may affirm the knowledge that God answers prayers, prophets also remind God's people of the possibility that "your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear" them (Isa. 59:2 NIV).⁶

We can add to this list.

Jeremiah was told not to pray for His people anymore. God was not going to answer.

⁶ Yarbrough, 300.

Did Paul have his thorn in the flesh removed?

Or consider Paul's fervent prayer for the salvation of his fellow Jews, where the fruit was meager rather than plentiful.

Or chief among prayers, is the prayer of our Lord in Gethsemane.⁷

And it is this last example that is the most important.

It is key to this entire section, I would say.

What did Jesus pray in the Garden?

Luke 22:42 saying, "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless **not My will, but Yours, be done.**"

I strongly think that John's language is connected with this testimony.

Jesus prayed submitting Himself to the Father.

Was Jesus' prayer heard?

Yes, His prayer was heard. It was answered not directly as Jesus prayed but according to God's saving purposes.

So, what does that mean for these verses?

We must seek to pray as best we can according to God's Will, guided by God's Word and directed by the Holy Spirit.

In this humility we can have boldness that God does indeed hear and answer.

But the answer is not simply as we request even as we pray for good things.

What John describes here in terms of prayer is the **beautiful fellowship** that we enjoy with God our Father because of the Lord Jesus Christ and the work of the Spirit.

⁷ Yarbrough, 301-302.

In this we are to have confidence that God hears us, and this leads to trust that God will act as He sees fit, in His timing, and for His glory.

And we submit to this joyfully.

Quoting Yarbrough again:

Proof of Moses' high esteem in God's sight lay in his "face-to-face" interchange with God, not his ability to direct God's ways with his prayers. Paul's vision of *coram deo* is not God's unlimited 'yes' but seeing God 'face to face' (1 Cor. 13:12).

So, to again summarize what John says here with what we see in other passages.

We are to pray according to God's Will.

Not every prayer will be answered as we directly pray.

But we can have full confidence that as we pray humbly God does hear and He will act in ways even greater than we can see.

At the heart of all of this is trust, confidence, and peace.

This is all part of the blessing that you now enjoy of eternal life – life lived in fellowship with our sovereign and gracious God.

Listen to a few passages that I believe parallel what John is saying.

Eph. 2:18 For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

Eph. 3:20 Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, **21** to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Phil. 4:6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; **7** and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

1Th. 5:16 Rejoice always, **17** pray without ceasing, **18** in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

1Th. 5:23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION

God grants assurance to His true children of eternal life so that you will seek Him boldly in prayer and have true assurance and peace that He hears your prayers.

Prayer

Hymn 531

BENEDICTION: 1 COR. 15:57-58

But thanks *be* to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.