

(1 John #30) Stock of Certainties

by J. Glyn Owen

The sermon emphasizes the certainty of a general principle that a Christian does not go on sinning, and the Christian experience of being born of God and having the power of the evil one broken.

Duration: 43:42

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Romans 12:2, 2 Corinthians 5:17, 2 Corinthians 5:21, 1 John 5:18-20

Topics: "Truth"

Description

In this sermon, the Apostle John concludes his epistle by presenting a cluster of certainties to challenge and comfort the readers. He emphasizes the importance of knowing the true God who can save and transform souls. John asserts that through Jesus Christ, we can see and know the Father. He warns against worshiping false gods and highlights the significance of having a genuine relationship with the true God.

Transcript

Well, now shall we turn together to the first epistle written by John in chapter 5, and we shall read again verses 18 to 20. We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not, but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not. And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth or lieth in wickedness.

And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. Now, the Apostle John is concluding his very wonderful epistle, comprising of only five chapters.

It is a very remarkable document, and I think that those of us who, over the last year or so, have been meditating upon the words and the teaching of this epistle will have to concede that it has the capacity both to challenge and to comfort. It searches us. It casts its rays of light deep into our consciences and into our hearts.

It searches us out. It makes us examine ourselves. It somehow helps us sift the wheat from the chaff.

But it is also full of comfort. There is hardly an epistle in the New Testament that is capable of bringing more comfort to those who are truly the children of God. And I trust that something of the challenge as well as of the comfort, the comfort as well as of the challenge, has found its way into our lives as we have been

meditating upon the teaching of this apostle of our Lord's.

But now, how will John wrap up or conclude the writing of the epistle? What's he going to do? Well, we have that conclusion really in the verses that we have chosen as our text tonight. This is really the closing word, as it were, the final message. And it is all given us in a cluster of certainties, or as I put it in our subject, a stock of certainties.

In the course of the epistle, John has been referring to some uncertainties. But he and those whom he addresses here, he with them, now comes to the end of the epistle, then they come to the end of reading it, he to the end of writing it, and he assumes that they with him can conclude on a note of glorious certainty, a threefold certainty. And I want us to look at these tonight and just see what God has to say to us as we meditate upon them, and what he's putting into our hands and into our hearts as we go out into the world to proclaim his word and to be witnesses for him.

Now let's look at these three certainties then. First of all, we have a certainty which is largely in the realm of the intellect, of the mind, of the understanding. It's the certainty of a general principle.

Look at these words in verse 18. We know, says John, that anyone born of God does not sin, but he who was born of God keeps him. This is the Revised Standard Version.

And the evil one does not touch him. Now let's look at this statement. This is the first certainty that you and I may have if we have applied the teaching of this epistle to ourselves and we discover that we are truly the sons of God and the daughters of God.

What is it, says John, talking about? Well, it's the certainty of a general principle. And we need to know this. We need to have this clearly embedded in our minds as we look at the world outside of us and as we apply the Christian faith to ourselves.

Here it is. We know that anyone born of God does not go on sinning, but he who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him. Now let's take it little by little.

The first point that we notice here is this. The Christian is described as a man or a woman that is born of God. This has been made true in the epistle already, over and over again.

John has a reference made to this. A Christian man is twice born. A Christian person is born a second time.

In the first place, a man is born of woman, to use a little usage. But a Christian is born again. He is born of God.

His first birth follows the normal processes of procreation. His second birth follows the principle of spiritual regeneration. So that every Christian man or every Christian woman is a person who has been born the second time.

Let me put the question. Are you quite sure? Am I quite sure? Are we sure tonight? As we come here into the house of God, are we quite sure that we know something about this being born again of the Spirit of God? It was, too, a very high-ranking ecclesiastic that our Lord Jesus had to say with some rigor and with a very pointed, almost accusation. Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he simply doesn't know and cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh. That which is born of the Spirit is Spirit. Marvel not that I say unto thee, ye, you must be born again.

It's not enough to be a child of Abraham according to the flesh. A child of Abraham according to the flesh must become a child of Abraham according to the Spirit. Abraham was a man of faith, and because he was a man of faith, he knew God.

In the knowledge of God, he was truly a child of God. Now, that's the first thing that John says. Now, look at the way he proceeds.

An inevitable and universal consequence of being twice born is this. Anyone born of God does not sin. Now, that really is a little bit confusing, the way it is put, because the casual reader would conclude that that means that anybody born of God doesn't sin anymore.

Now, that's not what John really said. We've examined this before as we've been plowing our way through the epistle, and we can just put it now in summary form. What John really said is this.

Any person who is born of God ceases to live a life of habitual sinning. In other words, the habit of his life is no longer doing that which is wrong in the sight of God. His habit is different from that.

He may sin. He may fall. John has been saying, actually, in the very first chapter, that if any man says that he has not sinned, well, he's just a liar.

He goes as far as that. Or if we say that we have not sinned in ourselves, the truth is not in us, he says. John is conceiving that we may have sin within us and that we may fall into sin.

But if any man is born of God, he does not go on habitually sinning. In other words, the characteristic of his life is not sin, but righteousness. Not wrongdoing, but right doing.

Not pleasing himself, but pleasing his God. What has happened, what has changed, then, is the tenor of his life. Looking at a man, you may judge what he is, because you see the habitual mode of living, either in accordance with sin, which is unrighteousness, or with goodness, which is righteousness.

If any man be in Christ, there is a new creation. Old things are passed away, behold, everything has become new, and all things are of God. Now, this is a principle that we must know.

We've gathered this, says John, we know this from what we've studied together in the bulk of this epistle. It's a general principle. And then he goes on to explain why.

Why is it that a man born of God does not go on sinning? Now, you will have noticed, if you follow the reading in your own New Testaments, you will have noticed from what I've said already that there are two different translations of the second part of verse 18. In the King James Version, we read this. He that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.

That's one translation. Another translation is this. He who was born of God keeps him.

Now, let's take one at a time. What does the first mean? Well, the first is fairly obvious, is it not? He that is begotten of God keeps himself. If that is what John really wanted to say, what he's meaning is this.

A man that has been begotten of God, that has been born the second time, has the divine nature within him. He has the Spirit of God residing in himself. And having the divine nature and the Spirit of God within him, he is a person who looks after himself spiritually, and who keeps himself pure and clean, who keeps himself from evil.

Now, this is quite biblical, and John might very well have been saying that. Let me remind you of other places, for example, where we have the same sentiment. In 1 Timothy chapter 5 and verse 22, Paul tells the young Timothy, keep yourself pure.

Keep yourself pure. Now, he's not talking to a non-Christian there. A non-Christian could not do that.

A man who is not born of the Spirit of God simply could not keep himself pure from sin. But Paul is addressing a Christian. And a Christian has the divine nature.

And he enjoys the privileges of a son of God. He can talk to his father. He can draw grace from the throne of grace.

And he has the Spirit of God within him. And he has the Word of God to guide him. And he has the fellowship of the people of God to encourage him.

And therefore, every Christian should be able to keep himself in that sense. James says exactly the same thing in principle in chapter 1 and verse 27 of his letter, when he says this, religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. Keep oneself.

Keep oneself. Now again, you see, James is not talking about the once-born person, but the twice-born person. If you're twice-born, you have capacities.

You have energies. You have within yourself the Spirit of God. And within you reach all the privileges of the children of God.

And therefore, you are responsible. I am responsible. You cannot say that you're a Christian man twice-born without acknowledging that you have responsibilities and obligations.

You have all the privileges of the children of the kingdom. Therefore, use your privileges. Draw upon your resources.

Keep yourself, says James. Keep yourself pure. Jude says exactly the same thing in principle.

In Jude verse 21 of his one-chaptered letter, he says, keep yourselves in the love of God. Now, I don't need to harp upon that. John may be saying that.

He may be just referring back to what is just said. A man who is a true Christian has been born of God. He has the seed of God in him and the Spirit of God dwelling in him.

Therefore, he should keep himself from that which is evil. But now there's another possibility here. And linguistically, I think, this is quite as possible as the other.

And it's the one we've quoted from the Revised Standard Version, and you also find it in other versions of the New Testament. He who was born of God keeps him. Now, the reference here is to the Lord Jesus

Christ as the one begotten of God, born of God.

And He pledges to keep those that are twice born. If any man is a Christian, he is born of God. And the one begotten of God, the one person born of God, namely the Son of God, He keeps all the twice born.

Now, my good friends, this is equally true. Did not Jesus say that He will keep His sheep? Did He not say, no man shall be able to pluck them out of my Father's hand? I and my Father are one. Did He not say that He was the Good Shepherd? Does not the New Testament say that He is able to keep us from stumbling or from falling? That He is able to present us faultless before the throne of His Father with joy? Of course.

I'm not quite sure which John wanted to stress. Perhaps both. Because in one place, at any rate, the Apostle Paul brings the two together when he says this to the Philippians.

Work out your own salvation, he says, with fear and trembling. You work out your own salvation. But he did not stop there.

Why? What? Because God is at work in you, both to will and to do of His good pleasure. You do it because God is doing it. You work with God.

You respond to Him. God and you together in the fellowship which is salvation. You do that, says Paul.

It may very well be that John means us to take both here. I don't know. But at any rate, the thought is clear.

The Christian is a person who keeps himself and is kept from sin and evil by the One who is begotten of the Father, even the Lord Jesus Christ. And the consequence is this. Now again, our English, and especially the King James Version, is not very good here.

It says, and the wicked one doesn't touch Him. Well, the wicked one does touch Him. If by touch you mean temptation, it isn't touch.

Touch is not the right word here. Who is here untouched by temptation? The work of the devil, the hand of the devil. If touch is to be equated with temptation, then this language is not very appropriate.

The word that John really used should be translated a little different from that. What John really said was this. The wicked one doesn't cling to Him.

He's not able to get his teeth in, may I say that? Or can't get a grip on Him. I don't really know, and I don't want to dogmatize this. I don't want to say it dogmatically, but the picture that it conveyed to me, and I'm not a linguist, I'm not a specialist in languages, but the picture it conveyed to me is the picture of somebody mountaineering.

And you know, if you're climbing a mountain, you want to get a good foothold somewhere. And especially when the slope is a bit steep, you've got to get your foot in. And it's not safe to climb any higher until you've got your foot firm.

And I believe that what John is saying here is this. The devil can't get a foothold on the man that the Son of God keeps. Oh, he'll come and he'll touch you all right, and he'll tease, and he'll harass, he'll entice, and he'll suggest, he'll do all sorts of things, but he can't get a foothold.

He may get you down, but he'll rise up again, as we shall see in a moment. He doesn't really find a home in the heart of the man who is born of God. He has the first certificate, and it's in terms of a principle, something that every Christian knows.

As you think of your life, as you teach your children, as you go out into the world and represent the Christian faith to other people, know this. A man that has been born of God does not go on sinning that the habit is broken. Oh, he may fall, but the evil one doesn't really get a foothold in his life so that he can take control again.

That is because the person born of God is able to keep himself, and he's able to keep himself because the Lord Jesus is his Saviour. Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sin. Is Jesus Christ your Saviour? Then he saves you from your sin, and saves me from mine.

That's the first certainty, the certainty of a general principle that relates to those who profess to be Christian. Now look at the second. The second of John's certainties relates to personal experience.

Verse 19. We know that we are of God, and the whole world is in the power of the evil one. Now, let's take this again, little by little, piece by piece.

The apostle claims to be sure that he and his fellow Christians were born of God. We know, he says, that we are of God. So, according to this, a Christian man or a Christian woman may know that he belongs to God.

It is given us by the grace of God to know our spiritual pedigree. These things I write unto you, says John, in verse 13, in order that you may know that you are the children of God, that you are his people. I trust that all of us tonight will know of a certainty that we are born of God, and we are his people.

Because until we do, there are certain things in life that we can't tackle. We can hardly help other people beyond that place where we have come ourselves. We cannot lift other people higher than the level we ourselves have attained.

And if we don't know this kind of certainty, then we cannot lead other people into the certainty of God's mercy and God's grace. Now, how can you know that you are of God, born of God? Well, it may be that John is referring back to the verse that we have just been looking at. We know that whosoever is born of God does not go on sinning.

Therefore, it may be that what he had in mind was this. The habit of sin has been broken in our lives. The tyranny of it, the mastery of it.

You remember that word in Romans chapter 6, where Paul says, Sin shall not have dominion over you. Every man and woman who has been baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ and is a child of God, every man and woman who is born again, that person is a person concerning whom you may say, Sin shall not have dominion over him. He is capable, says Paul at the end of Romans 5, of reigning in life.

Now, these are great terms, and either they are true or they are false. A Christian is a man who can reign. He is a king.

He is called to be nothing less than a king in the midst of life and in the midst of death. Sin shall not have dominion over you. Now, we know, therefore, if this dominion has been broken within us, we know that

God has done something within us.

We know that salvation has begun. I was reminded as I came out from the house tonight of an incident in one of the old Scottish kirks when they used very seriously to cross-examine incoming members into the fellowship. This was the prerogative of the minister and a number of the elders acting in concert.

There was a young lass in her late teens, timid and shy, without many words on her lips, who made a profession of faith and sought access to the fellowship. And an old, dour elder questioned her. The first question was this, Have you discovered that you are a great sinner? To which the little lass, looking up at him, said with trembling voice, Yes, sir, I have.

Second question was this, Have you discovered that the Lord Jesus Christ is able to save you from your sin? And with half a smile, albeit still timidly, she said, Yes, sir, I have. The third question was this, Having discovered that you are a great sinner and that Jesus Christ is able to save you from your sin, do you now sin? Looking utterly confused, the little lass said, Sir, she says, I do, I do. Say it again, lass, said the old elder, without a smile on his face, a forbidding look, giving the girl no cue as to what he expected.

Say it again, if you have discovered that you are a great sinner and that Jesus Christ is a great Saviour who is able to save you from your sin, do you still sin? I do, sir, she said, I must be honest. Well then, said he, what's the difference? He used to sin. You've discovered that you're a great sinner and you've discovered that Jesus Christ is a Saviour, what's the difference now that He's your Saviour? And she scratched her head and she says, I find it very difficult to explain, she said, but it seems somewhat like this.

And, as it were, with a puzzled look, she said, it used to be as if I were running after sin, and it seems now to be that sin is running after me rather than I running after it. You know, that's exactly the truth of the case. In our unregenerate condition, our hearts and our lives and our spirits go out after evil, deep within us calls to deep without, and anything the devil dangles before us, we fall for it.

The difference in the man who has been changed by the grace of God and become a child of God is this, he does not go on sinning, the tyranny of sin has been broken, though sin still runs after him, Satan runs after him. We may know, says John, we may know that we are of God when that tyranny has been broken. Because only God can do that.

Satan can mar, but it's only God that can make us again, so that the image of the Father is embossed upon us. But Christian certainty deepens by contrasting the genuinely Christian experience with that of the whole unbelieving world. And I think this is the main thrust in verse 19.

Look at it again. We know that we are of God, and the whole world is in the power of the evil one. Now John has already said, said it three times as a matter of fact in the body of the epistle, that the whole world is of the evil one.

He's already said that. I believe that what he wants to stress now is that the world of unregenerate men and women are quite happy in the lap of the evil one. The whole world lieth in the evil one.

It's lying down, you see. Now this is the characteristic of the world outside of the church, outside of Christ. Men and women are happy to lie down in sin.

Happy with it. They like it. If you try to get them out of it, well they say, no, no, no, you can't take me away from this, or you can't take this away from me.

I must have my sin. I must have my habit. I must have this and that, and I can't live without it.

They're lying in it, you see, like sheep in a meadow. Lying down, chewing the cud. This is their life.

This is their element. They're lying in it. And if you threaten to take their sin away from them, they'll almost strangle you.

Now by contrast, says John, we know that we are of God. Why? Because he that is begotten of God does not go on sinning. He can't lie down in it.

You may fall into sin, but you get up again when you want to leave it. You'll be tripped, and you get down, and you'll do that which is evil. But you hate yourself, and you loathe yourself, and you look to your Savior, and you say, oh Lord, have mercy upon me.

Forgive me. We'll turn to the fount where sin is washed away. We'll confess our sins, and we'll discover again that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, is able not only to cleanse us from sin, but from unrighteousness.

What John wants us to get here is this, that the habit of life that is disgusted with sin and loathes evil proves that we are out of God, born of God. I came across this little statement somewhere. I'm not sure who the author is.

As there can be no argument of chemistry in proof of odors, like a present perfume itself, as the shining of the stars is a better proof of their existence than the figures of an astronomer, as the restored patient is a better argument for the skill of a physician than his paper qualifications, as the testimony of the calendar that summer has arrived on a certain day is not half as compelling a testimony as the blue sky above, the warm air and the gentle breeze, the most assuring of all assuring factors in relation to the soul's birth of God is to see itself weaned away from the world that is content to lie in sin in order to cultivate a walk of fellowship with God. My friend, if you are weaned away from sin and can't lie down in it at any cost, at any price, that means that you can say about yourself that you're born of God. It's the second certainty.

There is no doubt about it that the man who is dissatisfied with himself and his condition and is leaving every semblance of sin in order to perfect himself before God by his grace is a man who is born of God and not simply a woman, twice born. The third certainty is this. The third in this stock of certainties relates to the particular and exclusive means whereby men can be born of God and saved from their sin and from the world.

It is the certainty of the way of salvation. And we know, says John, and we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding to know him that is true, and we are in him that is true and in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God.

Now, very briefly as we close, if it is true that the whole world lies in the evil one or in evil, content to lie motionless in an element that will at last crush them to eternal misery, and some of us have found a way out of that, some of us have found an exodus out of that death-like vice, and have found a way into fellowship with God, the true God who saves from sin and makes men anew and keeps them from sinning, if it is true that we have made this great discovery, it is so necessary that we are sure of the way of

salvation that we may share it with others. What is it? First of all, John points to the historical basis of it all. We know, he says, that the Son of God has come.

It is not Christmas time yet. But John points us back unequivocally to one historical event, and it all started there, says John. God the Son became man.

The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. God came in the person of his Son. He arrived.

My good friends, if you are a Christian, there should be a dance in your soul as you contemplate this, and as I do. God the Son came, and because he came, this kind of thing is possible. If he had not come, you and I would still be lying in our sin.

I dare not think, I dare not imagine tonight where I myself would be if it were not that Jesus came in history, first of all, and then ultimately into my own life. Jesus came, and when Jesus came, the whole movement began. Whereby the power of sin in human life can be broken.

He came, the Son of God. Now, I'm passing that. It's important enough to keep us together for a week, but let me pass it in order to come to this.

We know that the Son of God has come, and, says John, has given us an understanding that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true. Now, the one thing I want to stress is this. He who came, says John, has given us an understanding to know him that is genuine and real.

A true God, a true Savior, a genuine Savior, a genuine and real Savior, the real God. There are so many gods about. That is, objects that we treat as if they were deities.

And sometimes persons, too. We worship them. This is a world that loves to worship its idols, and the idols of the world are many.

I shall not attempt to enumerate. You may use your own imaginations, but all the people that are worshipped tonight, just because of their capacity to run a little faster than somebody else, or to crack jokes on the television screen, or to do this, that, or the other, and they're worshipped. And when they die, a whole world mourns, though they may be living in gross immorality.

And a whole world mourns because an open sinner has died, not because he's gone to hell, but because their God has vanished. This is a very sad state of affairs. There are tin toys and tin gods, but there's a real God, says John, who does the real work of salvation, who salvages the soul, who remakes man after his image.

The God of creation is the God who recreates the real God. Now, says John, He who came, the Son of God who came to do this work, He has given to us who are twice born, He has given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true, and to be in Him that is true. Now, this is the climax of a mode of reasoning which has many previous aspects to it.

John tells us in his gospel, and he tells us indeed in this epistle, that in the Lord Jesus Christ we see God. You remember the words of the gospel? Jesus said, They that have seen me have seen the Father. But there were people who saw Jesus who never saw the Father in Him.

There were many people who saw Jesus, saw Him working His miracles, heard Him teach Him, teaching with authority, with clarity, but they never saw God, they never heard God. Now, says one of those who

used to be called a Son of Thunder, if I rightly understand that, he must have had a fairly quick temper, and he was the type of man who wanted to call all heaven down in judgment upon others. That's the kind of man he was.

But now he says, something happened to us? I am the rest of us, he says, something happened. Not only did we see God in Christ and hear God in Christ, but He who is born of God gave us a dianoia. It's a special word.

He gave us an understanding. He gave us the capacity to recognize Him. To see that He is the true God.

And having seen that He is the true God, now because of a right relationship with Him, to be living in Him, in fellowship with Him. My friends, this is a wonderful gospel. Jesus Christ not only came to declare that there is eternal life in Himself, He has come to impart to men this capacity to understand that in Him God has come.

That He is real, that He is true, that He is genuine. And therefore, in the Christ who has come and done everything that is necessary for our redemption, to come to know the true God. That's why John concludes this epistle with this warning.

Now he says, little children, keep yourselves from idols. Jesus has given you the capacity to know the true God. Explore it.

Exploit it. Employ it. Act upon it.

Use it. Use your time and get to know the God for whom you have a capacity to know. Whom you have a capacity to know.

May I close then with these three clusters and us, whether tonight you and I are quite sure that we are the children of God twice born. Are we sure that the Lord God Almighty has done something in these souls of ours that no amount of human psychology or preaching or persuasion or coaxing could do? Are we quite sure that our so-called Christian experience was not psychologically induced and is simply skin deep and can vanish when the weather changes? For a work of God in the soul of man is a work that abides for all eternity. If any man be in Christ, there is a new creation there.

We know. We know. We know.

And we know it all because He has made it possible and He has given to us all this, says John, wrapped up in the one little parcel across which we write eternal life. Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, do we acknowledge before Thee that the word of Scripture always seems to penetrate into the depths of our minds and our hearts and consciences. And those of us who have been browsing through this epistle written by Thy servant John of old have found that almost in every verse we are challenged. And tonight again as we have been meditating upon these three certainties, they have their own peculiar way of getting under our skin and into our hearts.

Father, we would know Thee as Thine apostles did. We do not ask that we should have all the privileges that they had. Indeed, we know that that is not possible.

But we do ask that we may know Thee as the real God in Jesus Christ. Draw us after Thee then. And in each of our lives where this experience of knowing Thee has begun, deepen it, quicken it, perfect it.

And help us to keep ourselves from idols and to give of our hearts entire worship, its love and its faith and its joy and thanksgiving and obeisance. Help us to give all our hearts to Thee who are the true one. And help us, we pray, as we walk among men who know Thee not and who lie in the wicked one and who are apparently quite happy to live and lie down in evil.

O Lord, help us to bring light to them and life to them and love to them. And help us to be before them the very epistles of heaven and of God. May we be the message as well as the bearers of a message that Thou shalt have glory and men's salvation.

And in this way, O Lord, if it please Thee, extend the bounds of the church and the numbers of the redeemed. Add to Thy church daily those whom Thou art saving. And grant that as numbers are added, so too our strength may be imbued with the Spirit in power.

Hear us now and forgive our sins, in Jesus' name. Amen.

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