

WALKING IN THE LIGHT- First John and the Path to Living Deeply in Christ - Part twenty-four

Sunday, July 4th, 2021 - 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #2115

Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

THE LIFE OF PRAYER AND THE SIN THAT LEADS TO DEATH

1 John 5:13-17 - "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life. [14] And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. [15] And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him. [16] If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that. [17] All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death."

I have four ideas I want to study in this packed text. We'll look at two of them today and two more next Sunday. Next Sunday is when we'll study that "***sin that leads to death***" and, hopefully, show why John mentions it while discussing the Christian at prayer. It seems to me this will get to the heart of John's main practical concern. But first, let's look at some of the details of the passage together:

Verse 13 is really a summation verse of the entire letter - **"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life."** Nothing is more important than having ***eternal life***. We must be ***sure*** of this. John's ***gospel*** is written so people might ***come to faith*** and ***believe*** in Jesus Christ - **John 20:31** - **".... these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."**

John's ***first epistle*** is written to people who ***already believe***. It's written so that people who are troubled - people who experience hard times, people who face situations that would tear their hearts apart with doubt and turmoil - so these believers might ***know*** they have eternal life. Here is hope. Here is strength. Here is glorious certainty.

That is the thrust of this epistle of First John. True, the **"whole world lies in the power of the evil one"**(5:19). But the Christian can still have an anchor for his soul. He can still have eternal life. And he can still ***know*** that he has eternal life. There are ***signs of God's eternal life*** indwelling our souls. John has dealt with several of them quite specifically:

- a) ***There's a readiness to confess and forsake all sin - 1 John 1:8-10***
- "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. [9] *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. [10] If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.*" - IPAD TEXT
- b) ***Another sign of eternal life is we pursue Christlikeness in all areas of life - 1 John 2:5-6 - "...but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may be sure that we are in him: [6] whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked."*** - IPAD TEXT
- c) ***Another sign of eternal life is unconditional love for all who are in the family of God - 1 John 4:7-8 - "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. [8] Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love."*** - IPAD TEXT

- d) ***Another sign of eternal life is a diminishing interest in the things of this world - 1 John 2:15-17 - "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. [16] For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. [17] And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever."*** - IPAD TEXT

In today's text John deals with another prominent manifestation of the eternal life in the heart. The Spirit, as one would expect, expresses outwardly the new nature of the Christian by helping him call out to the Father in ***prayer***. Notice that John emphasizes this in pasting two ideas together in the ***first two verses*** of our text:

IPAD TEXT - "I write these things to you who *believe* in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life"(13), and "And this is the confidence that we have *toward* him, that *if we ask anything according to his will he hears us*"(14).

The one who ***believes*** doesn't just believe with his head. He or she comes with confidence "***toward***" God in prayer (14). Prayer is what Christians ***do***. They ***approach*** God. Prayer is how belief ***manifests*** itself. John feels compelled to expand on this:

1) THE CHRISTIAN LONGS TO COME TOWARD GOD

IPAD TEXT - 1 John 5:14 - "And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us."

"Toward" is a *direction* word. It's a *movement* word. This is John's point. There's *believing* and there is *approaching*. John means if I truly *believe*, if I have eternal life in my heart, that life manifests itself in *drawing me into prayer* - *honest* prayer - *searching* prayer - the kind of prayer that puts everything else about my agenda on *hold* while I deal with God.

What a searching issue this is! All sorts of people *profess* belief. All sorts of people *go to church*. John would ask if you are a *specialist* in prayer. What is the *condition* of your prayer life? Do you *spend time adoringly* before the throne of God? Is prayer a *passionate* activity that takes *blocks* of your time?

John says something else here. He says we have *confidence* in approaching God. God is no longer seen as a *threat*. This is cutting to the chase. I can't pray if I feel condemned. I won't pray if I fear God's frown.

Why don't people pray more? I think John deals with two very basic reasons in these verses. One of the reasons people don't pray more is **they're not sure it really works**. They **want** to believe, especially when they have some really big problem and want God's help but can't always convince themselves. We'll look more at this point in just a minute.

But perhaps the **primary** reason people find it hard to pray is **they feel guilty and unworthy when they approach God**. Like *Isaiah* they feel "**unclean**" and "**undone**" when they try to talk with God.

This makes some sense. Prayer won't work unless I'm **honest**. And I feel I can't **afford** to be honest with a God who is as holy as the God of the Bible. Quite naturally, I'm inclined to **avoid** contact with Him.

That's why John reminds us so often in this epistle of the striking, destiny changing truth "**....that we should be called children of God; and so we are**" (3:1). Remembering the cross isn't just for **communion Sunday**. If you forget the cross you won't pray. If you forget about Jesus and the change His redemption made you won't pray. We have a whole New Testament written to pump the impact of Christ's death into our minds and hearts so repeatedly it stamps and imprints everything about us - **including**, and perhaps **especially**, the way we can now pray:

No book in the New Testament celebrates this like the letter to the Hebrews:

IPAD TEXT - Hebrews 4:14-15 - "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. [15] For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin."

IPAD TEXT - Hebrews 10:19-23 - "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, [20] by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, [21] and since we have a great priest over the house of God, [22] let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. [23] Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful."

2) **NOT ONLY DOES GOD HEAR US - HE ANSWERS OUR PRAYERS**

IPAD TEXT - 1 John 5:14-15 - "And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will *he hears us*. [15] And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him."

At the very same time we *love* these words and we're a bit *embarrassed* by them. How many have ever prayed for anything and not received it?

OK, we have a problem. What are we going to do with these words from John? Can anyone ask for whatever they want and always get it from God?

What if you are praying for rain and I'm praying for sun - and we live in the same house? Clearly, there are some problems with this kind of promise. Are there other passages in the Bible that can help and shed light on this subject? I think there are:

IPAD TEXT - James 4:3 - "You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions."

So we *do* know it is possible for a person to ask and *not* receive. The Bible says so. There's more:

IPAD TEXT - Matthew 21:22 - "And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith." We see that it's possible to ask, but not from a stance of faithful trust in Father God. That will suck the strength out of prayer. There's more yet:

IPAD TEXT - John 15:7 - "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."

IPAD TEXT - 1 John 3:21-22 - "Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; [22] and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him."

Here I learn my request can't be the bubbly froth of a *divided heart*. I have to know and love God the way John describes, with an obedient, submissive, devoted heart. **Genies** grant wishes. **God** answers the *prayers of His devoted children*.

But there is one other passage that I think captures the central thought of our text's words. John says, **"And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us"**(5:14).- **IPAD TEXT**. I want to talk about this theme of praying *according to God's will*.

Please think this through for a few minutes with me. A passage that sheds perhaps the most light on John's words is **Romans 8:26-27 - "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. [27] And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."** - IPAD TEXT

Let's link these verses with our text. Have them both open so you can flip back and forth to see the connection in your own Bible:

IPAD TEXT - "...If we ask anything according to his will he hears us"(1 John 5:14). Now back again to Romans 8:26-27 - "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. [27] And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."

I hope you can see there's a **process** in prayer that becomes more than just **you** praying. Paul puts the Holy Spirit on bended knee with us. There is a spiritual praying where the Holy Spirit **joins** in with us - where He becomes our **prayer hard drive**, so to speak - where we are **led beyond our own interests and ideas**.

I don't think it happens quickly. We have to turn off the TV. It's something a computer program or book can't do for you. It takes time. But Paul is still emphatic. The Spirit wants to pray with, in, and through us. We don't always feel it to the same degree. We're certainly frail and faulty vessels for His work. But it's what makes prayer a **spiritual** exercise. It's what **links** us with our Heavenly Father.

And the **key link** between Paul's profound words and our text from 1 John is this. John talks about the power that comes from praying with **confidence** because we're praying **according to the will of God - 1 John 5:14** - "And this is the **confidence** that we have toward him, that if we ask anything **according to his will** he hears us."

It's like Paul had been eavesdropping on John. Paul says specifically what John implies. Paul says the Father knows we find prayer like this difficult. God has made provision specifically for keeping our prayers on track. The Holy Spirit is the one who **forms our prayers** according to the **will of Father God - Romans 8:27** - "And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints **according to the will of God.**" - IPAD TEXT.

Listen to these timeless words from a great old commentary on First John by Robert Candlish: "In asking according to His will we put ourselves in the same position with Him willing it. He and we look at it from the same point of view. We who ask identify ourselves with Him who wills. Whatever we ask, we ask from within the circle of His will, becoming one in our asking with Him who is willing. In plain terms, our asking must be one in interest, one in sympathy, in character, in end and in aim, one in life, holiness and manner of living with Him whom we ask. In our asking we wait on God. We seek to judge as God judges, in the view not merely of temporal interests merely, but of eternal issues."

"We don't merely offer our requests, we seek to know His mind, and this with a readiness to make His mind ours. Do not rush this blessed interview. Look at the issue from every point of view. Do not be in haste as to what you should ask. Form the same idea of life that God has, that Christ has."

What powerful words! We love the **sound** of them. And yet we can easily leave them for some monastic saint who lives in the desert and never eats. Let's be honest. We **admire** words like that and we **fear** them too. And we fear them because we can tell, just by reading them, prayer like that takes **time - lots** of time. They tell me **Spirit-inspired** prayer can't just be fired off like an **email** to God.

Praying ***according to the will of God*** - praying ***with the Spirit*** - is like ***soaking your heart in dye***. The longer you leave it in, the deeper the color forms.