

The First Epistle of John

...so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ (1John 1:3)

1John 5:14-15

Review

Where is John writing from?

What heresy was he addressing?

What flavor of Gnosticism was John specifically dealing with?

What did the heretics teach?

How does John deal with this false teaching?

1John 1:6-10

Someone read vv5:6-10

Someone read vv5:11-15

It certainly is not an accident that John closes his letter with an emphasis upon the subject of prayer. He has been writing about the life of Christ -- the only life that can truly be called a Christian life.

That life is characterized by what three things?

Truth, love and righteousness

Prayer is the perfect expression of all three of these: Love is prayer's motive, Truth is its expression, and Righteousness its goal.

There is a deep-seated instinct for prayer buried within each human being. Given enough stress, given the right circumstances, it will come out.

Some examples of this truism:

"There are no atheists in fox holes."

If you've ever heard the recording of a flight recording of a plane that has crashed, what will you most likely hear?

I remember hearing of a sea captain who described the violence of a storm by saying, "God heard from plenty of strangers that night."

Perhaps there is no aspect of Christian faith that is so puzzling to many as that of unanswered prayer.

Almost all the problems in prayer are a result of ignorance of the nature of prayer. Prayer is a mysterious thing to many, and, because they do not understand it, they make experiments in the realm of prayer.

But these experiments sometimes do not turn out, and many have lost faith in prayer because they do not have a proper understanding of the nature and purpose of prayer. Their prayers have gone unanswered. They conclude that prayer is a failure, and God himself is a failure.

Prayer is a deceptively simple thing. It does not appear very difficult or complex and it is available to the simplest of people. Even children can pray, and pray very successfully, and very effectively. Yet the understanding of the nature of prayer is infinitely complex and requires some considerable knowledge before prayers are answered regularly. In this closing section of his letter John gives us certain basic, general principles about prayer, then he follows them with a specific illustration. We have first the general principles in Verses 14 and 15:

And this is the confidence which we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him. (1 John 5:14-15 RSV)

Some commentators have concluded – from not very clear evidence – that the last 9 verses were added to John's letter sometime after he wrote what came previously. These critics also make this argument about the 21st chapter of John's Gospel.

Both Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria (mid-2nd Century) quote from the last 9 verses, and attribute their quotes to the Apostle John. Further, the style of the writing precisely matches the style of the previous chapters – it's hard to believe that a later editor could so exactly match John's style.

As I have suggested, for many Christians prayer is a venture, an experiment. There is nothing very certain about it. We often pray because we do not know what else to do. Who of us has not at one time or another said, "Well, things have gotten so bad there's nothing else to do but pray," as though that were the final and last resort. But you do not see that attitude in the Apostle John.

What is his reaction to this matter of prayer?

"This is the confidence which we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, we know he hears us."

There is a great and ringing note of certainty there. Prayer is not an experiment; prayer is a certainty with John, a sure thing. He knows it works, and he knows how it works. That confidence is expressed by the word he chooses, *boldness* or *confidence*. "This is the boldness which we have in him; we know that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us."

parrhēsia

Thayer Definition:

- 1) freedom in speaking, unreservedness in speech
 - 1a) openly, frankly, i.e without concealment
 - 1b) without ambiguity or circumlocution
 - 1c) without the use of figures and comparisons
- 2) free and fearless confidence, cheerful courage, boldness, assurance

“Before him” = *pros auton* = means literally “toward Him” (ESV) or “approaching him” (NIV). Some commentators see **PROS** in this verse as shorthand for the idiomatic expression **PROSÔPON PROS PROSÔPON** (literally "face to face", RWP). Signifies intimacy with God in prayer.

Now you cannot read the New Testament without realizing that God delights in bold praying, and in bold people.

See Hebrews 4:14-16 and Hebrews 10:19 KJV.

This is what ought to characterize prayer. It should be bold, confident, certain.

This kind of certainty arises from the knowledge of two fundamental principles of prayer, which John gives us here: the certainty of hearing, and the certainty of having.

"If we ask anything according to his will, we know that he hears us."

Perhaps the major reason for most of the unanswered prayers of the world is they are not according to God's will, and therefore they are not heard, or at least result in the answer “No”. John makes it explicitly clear that a prayer that is according to God's will is always heard. Thus, at one stroke he demolishes all those concepts of prayer which imply that prayer is a means of getting God to do our will. Prayer is never that.

There are many people who regard prayer as some kind of mysterious device by which human beings get God to do what we want him to do, a kind of Aladdin's Lamp which, if we rub it in the right way, will cause the great Genie of heaven to appear and give us our requests. God becomes a kind of heavenly bellboy rushing to our aid when we push the button of prayer. It is this concept which has resulted in some of the frightful perversions of prayer.

For instance, there are the faith healers on TBN, like Benny Hinn, who make arrogant, blasphemous demands upon a patient and longsuffering God, commanding him to do things which they insist are their right to ask, though it is very evident that God is regarded as a junior partner in their business relationship.

Benny Hinn is a charlatan. His only interest is how much money he can make and the adoration of his devoted fans. He doesn't even understand the Bible very well.

But his prayers – and other prayers of people like him - is not prayer and never was prayer.

Prayer is a means of obtaining the will of God, and is limited always by the will and purpose of God. If we pray outside the purpose, there is no assurance at all that our prayers are heard, and certainly not that they will be granted. Sometimes our prayers are not according to the will of God because our motives are wrong.

Let's look at what James says about prayer: James 4:3.

We want what *we* want, not what God wants.

Prayer that lies outside the will of God is an insult to God.

Look at Psalms 66:18: **If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened;**

Prayer must be according to God's will, John says, in the direction God is going, with a view to obtaining the purposes he intends.

Now let's look at Ps 66:19: **but God has surely listened and heard my voice in prayer.**

So, how can we know we are praying "according to His will?"

One way we can be certain is when we find something in His word.

Personalize scripture: Ps 91:1-4

What's another way we can tell when we are praying according to God's will?

See Romans 8:26-27

As these verses tell us, the Spirit of God helps us in our weakness by prompting our desires for more of the real life that satisfies, not only ourselves, but others as well. Thus, the Spirit is our Helper that we might pray according to his will..

Within the will of God there are tremendous things that he has provided for his own. The will of God includes all that we need. All that we really want is available to us and to our loved ones and friends within the will of God. There is nothing we need to pray for outside of it. Outside are only things that harm, injure and destroy us.

Perhaps we do not know exactly whether a request is the will of God for us or not, and the examples of Scripture make clear that it is not wrong to ask even for these things. But we must then always add, as Jesus himself added in the Garden of Gethsemane, what?

"nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42 KJV),

Prayer is designed only to obtain that which is within the will of God.

Thus, John says, that if you know that what you are asking for is within the will of God, if you have found a promise of God in Scripture, or, in seeking the mind of God there has come a deep and settled conviction in your heart from the Spirit of God that something is the will of God, then, knowing that this is the will of God you ask for it, you know that he hears. God always hears every prayer that is voiced within the boundaries of his will. This is the first certainty that forms the basis of prayer -- we know we are heard.

What does Jesus say in GJohn 11:42?

Because everything He did lay within the boundaries of the will of God.

That brings us then to the second certainty of prayer, the certainty of having: "If we know that he hears us," John says, "then we know that we have obtained the request that we made of him." Think of that! If we know it is according to his will, we know it is heard, and if we know it is heard, we know that we have it. God has already granted the request. In other words, God never says "No," except to that which lies outside his will.

What does Paul say in 2 Corinthians 1:20?

There are no negatives, it is all "yea and Amen." Isn't that wonderful? Do you dare to believe that?

Let's look at Psalms 84:11. No good thing!

God plays no favorites and has no special pets. He has intimates, but anyone can be his intimate who desires to be, and moves along the program God has outlined. He has intimates to whom he gives much more than others, but he has no favorites, and no limitations as to who can enter into these things. Anyone can who will, but the secret of prayer, as John suggests here, is to take, to believe that God has granted everything we ask within his will. The secret is to take. "You have it," John says. "We know that we have obtained the request made of him."

John really means what he writes. He is not trying to kid himself – or us. There is no kind of psychological gimmick here.

What tense is the verb "have" in?

What he is saying is that when we pray, and the request is made in the will of God, then the answer is absolutely sure and it is only a question of God's timing as to when it appears. It is up to God when that answer will come, but the request has been granted and therefore we can give thanks.

We can take from him and thank him for that which has been given, expecting it to appear in God's time. Remember that Jesus warned (in another context), "The times and the seasons are not for you to know," (Acts 1:7). Time is the only uncertain aspect about prayer. There are often delays in God's fulfillment of answers. This matter he reserves to himself. But as to the ultimate giving of the things requested, there is no uncertainty whatsoever.

Jesus made clear that God is not like a reluctant neighbor who needs to be wheedled, cajoled and enticed to give something. He gives eagerly, gladly, willingly.

Let's look at what Jesus says in Matthew 7:7.

Many prayer meetings are often pools of unbelief. Listen to the prayers in these meetings and so many times they are uttered in a begging tone of voice, as though the person offering the prayer felt he had to get God's arm and twist it a bit and persuade him reluctantly to come through. But this is not prayer, not biblical prayer. God is never like that, says Jesus.

See Luke 11:11

You would not do that, and God is much better than you. If you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father respond to your needs in prayer? That is the true basis of prayer.

John concludes with this because prayer is the simplest expression of our life in Jesus Christ manifest in a practical way. We are to be constantly praying, constantly making requests of God on this basis of His will, knowing that he hears us and grants it, and all we need say is, "Thank you, Lord."

Notice carefully, in reading the Gospels, that is what the Lord Jesus is always doing. Everywhere he goes it is simply, "Thank you, Father. Thank you for this, thank you for that. I know that you have heard me, I know that you have done this. Thank you."

His life was one of continual giving of thanks, and that is what we are expected to do:

1 Thess 5:18: "giving thanks in all things, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."

There's only one area where we may have legitimate doubt, and that is what God's will is regarding an unsaved person.

GJn 6:44. Cp. 2Pet 3:9, Acts 13:48

This is a time when we should always pray, "If it is your will, Father."