

The Confidence of Prayer

I John Series

I Jn 5:14-15

By Bill Denton

INTRODUCTION

A. We have talked about the fact that John was writing to people whose faith was under fire

1. Philosophers and theologians claimed to know God better and more deeply than did those who had faith in the Jesus of the gospel
2. The faithful were under attack as people without the right knowledge or experience
3. The result was that people were beginning to look to things other than God's revealed word, and to the historical, factual Jesus who died for their sins

B. This attack produced a serious lack of confidence in the promises of God and the relationship between himself and his people

1. People doubted that Jesus could handle the problem of sin
2. Confidence was replaced by a system of mystical claims of no substance
3. The result was a weakened church, a confused church, and an uneasiness of the soul that caused people to forget the power of the gospel

C. When that kind of thing occurs, every connection between people and God becomes doubtful

1. This is especially true of prayer
2. Prayer is an act of faith, so if faith is weakened, prayer will necessarily become weak too

D. Having established throughout this letter, the power of the historical gospel, the trustworthiness of the gospel, and the absolute confidence we can have in God's ability to save us, John brings our minds around once again to prayer

1. John wrote to make us confident
2. Confident people have a direct connection to God in prayer
3. Once you establish confidence in God, you don't have to worry about confidence in prayer – it is a natural
4. I John 5:14-15 -- This is the confidence which we have before 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 the requests which we have asked from Him. NASB95

I. PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS

A. Illustration

I am convinced that the most outstanding enemy in prayer is the lack of knowledge of what we are in Christ, and of what he is in us, and what he did for us, and of our standing and legal rights before the throne.

E. W. Kenyon

1. Kenyon states an important truth – the enemy of prayer is not knowing who we are in Christ, or what he is in us, or what he did for us, and our standing and rights before The throne
2. Whenever you have doubts about those things, your prayers will suffer because you will lack the confidence those things bring

B. We live in an age, however, in which too much effort is put into building up self-confidence

1. Too often, prayer is little more than asking God for what we want
 - a. such an approach to prayer is terribly immature
 - b. it is like the little kid who nags his parents to buy him the latest fad toy, or some unimportant plaything – it is neither important nor necessary, and may even be harmful, but all he know is that he wants it
2. Think what happens when we combine a lack of confidence with an immature approach to prayer
 - a. we deliver our list of shopping items to God then sit back and wait for God to deliver
 - b. time goes by and we don't get what we asked for, so we draw some conclusions
 - 1) God doesn't listen to our prayers in the first place
 - 2) God either can't or won't give us what we asked for
 - 3) it doesn't do much good to pray
 - 4) our doubts and lack of confidence is affirmed and increases

C. Before John tells us in 5:14-15 that God will answer our prayers, he's already laid a groundwork

1. 1 John 3:22 -- and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight. NASB95
 - a. like it or not, answered prayer is based on some conditions
 - b. we can be confident in prayer because we keep his commandments
2. 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. NASB95
 - a. let's just rearrange the phrases of the sentence and maybe we'll see what we so often miss – "Ask whatever you wish, if you abide in me and my words abide in you, it will be done for you"
 - b. confidence in prayer is connected to abiding in Christ

3. John 14:14 -- "If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it. NASB95
 - a. here, the condition is that we ask in his name
 - 1) an appeal to his authority
 - 2) an appeal to his sovereignty
 - 3) an appeal to his will
 - b. confidence in prayer is based on asking in his name

D. Even in our text today, there is an important condition mentioned

1. "If we ask anything according to his will"
2. Barclay – "Jesus teaches us to pray: 'Thy will be done,' not 'Thy will be changed.'
 - a. I don't think we want to say that God will never change his mind about anything, but if he did, it would be the exception, not the rule
 - b. confidence comes from asking things that are in harmony and concert with his will
 - c. ask God to do what he wants to do and you can be sure it will be done
 - 1) Illustration

Every day we plead in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy will be done!" Yet when his will is done we grumble and are not pleased with it.
Meister Eckhart
 - 2) This is one of the identifying marks of Jesus – he came to do the Father's will, not his own and in his prayers he put himself in the Father's hands
 - 3) Luke 22:42 -- . . . "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done." NASB95

II. THE INDISPUTABLE NATURE OF CONFIDENCE IN PRAYER

- A. I John 5:14** -- This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. NASB95
1. The word for confidence = $\pi\alpha\rho\rho\eta\sigma\iota\alpha$ – originally freedom of speech; boldness, confidence, openness
 2. That confidence is connected to asking according to his will

B. John wanted his readers to understand the basis of prayer

1. Pray according to his will and he will hear us
2. Don't abuse that idea to mean God will hear just anything we decide to offer up
 - a. if it's not his will, why should he listen to it?
 - b. if it's against his will, who would expect him to listen?
 - c. if it's purely selfish and self-centered, we might as well pray to ourselves

C. We can be confident in our prayer, however

1. Let's list some of the things John has taught us in this little letter
 - a. he wrote so that we could have fellowship with God
 - b. he wrote so that we might understand the nature of God and reflect holiness in our own lives
 - c. he wrote so that we could be sure God effectively deals with the sins in our lives
 - d. he wrote so that we would keep God's commands
 - e. he wrote so that we would not love the world but that we would love God and do his will
 - f. he wrote so that we would understand the power of confessing Jesus as the Christ, the son of God
 - g. he wrote so that we would be confident in the promise of God of eternal life
 - h. he wrote so that we would not only love God, but that we would love each other
 - i. he wrote so that we would practice righteousness, not sin
 - j. he wrote so that our love would be real and meaningful, not just a bunch of talk
 - k. he wrote that we would be people of faith and overcome the world
 - l. he wrote so that we would know we have eternal life, the life of God in Christ
2. Hebrews 4:14-16 -- Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as *we are*, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.
NASB95

D. Why does it so often seem that we don't get what we pray for?

1. Discussion of the ways God answers prayer is not our purpose this morning, but let's at least say this: prayer is not really a chance to get God to see things our way; it is our opportunity to see things his way
2. David Jackman – "Answers to prayer do not depend on a right diagnosis or analysis of the problem by us as we pray, but on a childlike submission to the Father, knowing that he will give what is best according to his will. If he were to answer on any other basis, which of us would ever dare to pray again? We do not have that sort of wisdom."

CONCLUSION

A. You have a Father in heaven willing to listen to you, as you listen to him

B. Conclusion