

## 1 John 5:14-17

### Praying Boldly

Prayer: it is the simplest thing in the world to do and it is the hardest thing to do. As we near the end of the apostle John's first letter he encourages us to pray. John has been writing about our having fellowship with God and His Son Jesus Christ. In that fellowship or partnership we share in the very life of God. Trusting in Jesus Christ for salvation we are born of God. And our new life in Christ is characterized by truth, love and righteousness, and prayer is the perfect expression of all three. Love should be prayer's motive, truth its expression and righteousness its goal.

As I said prayer can be the easiest thing in the world to do. I believe there is a deep seated instinct for prayer in the human heart. Under the right kinds of pressure and circumstances people almost naturally pray. This is why it is said that there are no atheists in fox holes. But prayer can be difficult too. How should I pray? For what should I pray? And what about when it seems our prayers are not answered?

In our verses from 1 John the Word of God offers us certain basic, general principles about prayer. Then this is followed with a specific illustration. So let's begin with the encouragement to pray.

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. <sup>15</sup> And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.  
(1 John 5:14, 15)

It is very important that we make time to pray. It is essential if we wish to be faithful, robust believers. In Luke 18:1 Jesus Christ said that we "always ought to pray and not lose heart." In light of all that goes on in life, prayer is a means to keep us encouraged and hopeful. In fact, in the gospel of Mark, we are told that our Lord rose up a great while before daybreak to pray.<sup>1</sup> If Jesus needed time in prayer what makes us think that we do not?

And we are to have confidence or boldness when we pray. The Greek word translated "confidence" in verse 14 is parrhesia and it means to speak

---

<sup>1</sup> Mark 1:35)

openly, without fear, honestly and boldly with courage. The Word of God encourages bold prayer. Hebrews 4 declares,

Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God...<sup>16</sup> Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.  
(vv. 14-16)

And Hebrews 10 says,

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus...<sup>22</sup> let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith  
(vv. 19-22)

We can pray without worry or fear, we can pray openly, honestly and with boldness, because Jesus Christ has given us access to the Almighty who is now our Father. Let's read 1 John 5:14, 15 again.

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. <sup>15</sup> And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.  
(1 John 5:14, 15)

Before we examine what it means to ask according to the will of God, let's ask a question. Why does God want us to pray? First, God desires us to pray for our own benefit, blessing and peace of mind. Scripture tells us,

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

Could anything be more encouraging to devote time to prayer than these words? There is never a reason to fret or worry or to be full of anxiety when we can trust in God's care, wisdom and power. Therefore in everything, in all that concerns our hearts we are to pray.

The Greek word translated “prayer” indicates prayer made to God having regard to His great power and giving prominence to personal devotion and worship. The word “supplication” refers to our specific requests or needs. And in all our prayers our attitude should be one of great thanksgiving and gratitude. And when we pray trusting in God, believing that He knows what is best for us and that His strength will be with us in all that we do, our hearts and minds will be at peace.

Secondly, God wants us to pray because it is His way of bringing us into His work of salvation. In Ephesians 6 we are reminded that there is a great spiritual battle raging for the hearts and minds of men and women. Therefore in all of life we are to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. In our daily battle against wickedness and evil we are to put on the whole armor of God. We are to put on the breastplate of righteousness. We are to take up the shield of faith. We are to use the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. And we are to pray for all the believers and those who minister and serve.

praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—<sup>19</sup> and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel  
(Ephesians 6:18, 19)

All of us have needs and struggles and concerns. And even though we are not together every day and we do not always know what is happening in each other's lives, we can support one another in our prayers. All of us are gifted to serve in some way in the church. Some of us are called to encourage others. Some of us are gifted to show mercy. Some of us are able to give financially.<sup>2</sup> But one thing that we can all do is to pray for one another. Praying for one another is a way to manifest the love of God. Now, let's return to 1 John.

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. <sup>15</sup> And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.  
(1 John 5:14, 15)

In one stroke the apostle John demolishes the idea that prayer is a means of getting God to do my will. The Almighty is not a cosmic bell-hop rushing to

---

<sup>2</sup> Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6; 1 Peter 4:10, 11

grant my every wish. John wrote that our prayers must be according to the will of God to be heard. Stated negatively, James put it this way, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures."<sup>3</sup> In other words, are we asking for something for our own self-interest? Or are we really asking for that which will help us to live righteously and do good? Are we asking for something that makes us look good or to be more comfortable? Or are we asking for God to be gloried in our lives?

For example, I may be in a situation with a very disagreeable person. Maybe it is at work or at school or even at home. And so I pray, "God, please get this person out of my life." Or "Dear God can't you change so and so's heart?" Well, maybe it is God's will for me to be in that difficult situation. Maybe His goal is to change my heart. Therefore I may pray "God change so and so's heart." But I must also be willing for that not to happen in the way I want it to happen.

Perhaps God wants to make me more patient and loving and in that way to change the other person's heart. There are times when we know what the will of God is. God wants to meet my needs not my greeds. God desire for me to be holy and loving and kind. But if we don't know what the will of God is in a situation we can still pray. Romans 8 states that at times,

we do not know what we should pray for as we ought,  
but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us  
(Romans 8:26)

In other words we can speak in tongues so that we are edified and comforted and God's will is accomplished.

And we can always pray in the manner of the Lord's prayer. "Dear Father, hallowed be Your name. Work in my life, in this church, with my friends in a way we can bring you glory and honor. Your will be done. Work in me to will and to do of Your good pleasure. I ask you to meet our needs and to protect us from evil." God will always answer our prayers when they are according to His will.

It may not be how we envision it or according to our time table. But God will make good on His promises. God will do His part if we are faithful to do our part. But let me bring up one more point. At times it may be God's will for us to go through very difficult situations, not to cause us pain for pain's sake, but to serve someone else or to make us more like Christ.

---

<sup>3</sup> James 4:3)

In 1 Corinthians 11 and 12 the apostle Paul wrote about his troubles. He had been stoned, whipped, he had been in jail and he had been hungry and cold. And three times he prayed to the Lord to remove this thorn in the flesh. And the answer was simply this: "My grace is sufficient for you."<sup>4</sup> If it is needed for us to go through a time of trial for our good or another's, we can count on the strength of the Lord to work in us.<sup>5</sup>

Now, we come to a specific example of praying according to the will of God.

If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin *which does not lead* to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not *leading* to death. There is sin *leading* to death. I do not say that he should pray about that. <sup>17</sup> All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not *leading* to death.  
(1 John 5:16, 17)

Having told us that we can have confidence in our prayers, John provides us with an example of praying according to the will of God. In our prayers we often think of our own needs: a good job, good health and so on. But John points us not to ourselves but to the needs of others. His example of prayer according to the will of God is intercession for another person.

Having access to God through prayer implies we have a responsibility to support one another in our prayers, especially when we fall into sin. It is the will of our heavenly Father that we pray for the restoration of a brother or sister caught in the web of sin. In Galatians 6:1 we are told, "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness."

Someone caught up in sin can be rescued from that tyranny by our prayers and love. But the Word of God also tells us that there are times when someone's heart is so deep into sin that it leads to death. And there is nothing we can do about it. To be honest with you I don't really understand what is meant by sin leading to death. It may not be so much a particular action but an attitude of the heart.

In Acts 5 a married couple named Ananias and Sapphira sold some possession of theirs to give money to the Lord as an offering. But they lied about

---

<sup>4</sup> 2 Corinthians 12:9

<sup>5</sup> Philippians 1:29 tells us that it has not only been granted to us to believe in Jesus Christ, but also to suffer for his sake. 1 Peter 1:5-7 reveals that at times it may be necessary to go through various trials so that the genuineness of our faith may be seen and praised.

the amount they were giving. And it is not really clear what evil was in the heart, but it must have been grave, because when confronted with their lie they both died. In 1 Corinthians 11 the apostle Paul reproved the church because there were divisions and factions. When the church came together to share a meal and the Lord's Supper some people were drunk and others ate all the food before those who were really hungry arrived. At a time when the believers should think about the love and sacrifice of Christ and loving one another they were selfish. And Paul said that was why many among them were sick and dying.

God does chasten His people and judgment begins in the house of God.<sup>6</sup> There are consequences for sin even for God's people. Also, could John have meant that the sin unto death was the sin of the false teachers who denied the truth about Christ? He could be. In chapter 2:23 the apostle wrote that, "Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father." To be without God and Christ is to be without hope of everlasting life.

But we shouldn't be too quick to assume that someone has sinned so badly that they cannot be helped. An example from the life of Peter should make us more willing to pray that not. Peter loved the Lord Jesus Christ. But the night of Christ's arrest Peter vehemently denied the Lord Jesus Christ with oaths and cursing. Peter was cowardly and turned his back on Jesus Christ. But he did not die for that sin. Why? Jesus Christ had prayed for Peter. In Luke 22 Jesus said,

Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. <sup>32</sup> But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.  
(vv. 31, 32)

We do not need encouragement not to pray. That comes all too easily. We need encouragement to pray, especially for one another. When we pray with confidence focused on the power, grace and love of God we are changed for the better. May God grant us confidence and assurance in our prayers for His glory and our own good.

---

<sup>6</sup> Hebrews 12:7; 1 Peter 4:17

