

1 John 5:13-21 (ESV)

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.

¹⁸ We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.

¹⁹ We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

²⁰ And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

²¹ Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

We conclude our series in I John this morning by looking at the gift of God in the Gospel.

That gift is of course the LORD JESUS Christ. It's what we celebrate during Advent and Christmas. The incarnation of the eternal Son of God makes the goal of our faith possible, that of eternal life.

Sometimes we lose sight of that, especially in this time of year when our thoughts naturally are centered on the festivities of the season.

Christmas is a joyful and nostalgic time of year. We count our blessings. We think about what's most important in life, and we try to set aside those worries that burden us down.

We exchange gifts and greetings. We think about those who couldn't be with us. We eat way too much of that which ten days from now we'll swear will never touch our lips again.

Our focus is either on the here and now or perhaps the past. In church the Nativity account gains prominence this time of year. Joseph, Mary, the shepherds. What happened in Bethlehem long ago is what we ponder upon in our hearts.

But our text begins with this matter of eternal life. **1 John 5:13**

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.

If you are young, eternal life may seem like the distant future that has little relevance to your life right now.

But in fact, the Bible presents the gift of eternal life as a present reality that makes a huge difference in how you live your life now.

Without the confidence that your life has eternal meaning, what assurance do you have that the choices you make in life have any lasting significance?

Confidence in Prayer

Examining what we ask for

Protection from the evil one

The sin that leads to death

Final Exhortation

Keep yourselves from idols

1 John 5:14(ESV)

And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.

Confidence in prayer. What does that mean? Does confidence produce faith or does faith produce confidence?

Confidence is a humble reliance and trust in the benevolence of the covenant keeping God of the incarnation.

Sometimes confidence is thought of as arrogance or being prideful.

Confidence is certainly needed in any kind of leadership position. A quarterback who has lost his confidence is certainly not going to lead his team to victory.

But a brash and presumptuous faith isn't what John is talking about here. Confidence is a humble reliance and trust in the benevolence of the covenant keeping God of the incarnation.

That's what prayer is all about. It's not a name it claim it mentality that makes God our servant. It's an acknowledgement that we are His servants, and that He is kind and good to those who trust in Him.

That's why we can be confident that He hears us when we pray. Prayer is communion with God; and not a generic higher power, but the God who came into this world through His Son.

Four times in this short letter John speaks of our confident standing before God.

1 John 4:17 (ESV)

By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world.

Our confidence is based in the God who became one of us through the incarnation.

1 John 2:28 (ESV)

And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.

Our confidence is based in the one who not only came to Bethlehem as a baby, but the one who will come again to judge the quick and the dead.

1 John 3:21 (ESV)

Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God;

Our confidence is based in our redemption, that as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

What is it that we can ask God for? The word “anything” stands out in verse 14, but it doesn’t stand alone. “If we ask **anything according to His will** He hears us.”

Our confidence is based in the benevolence of the God who desires our ultimate good for His glory.

Any parent knows what happens if you give a child everything they want without discernment. A wise parent will say no to lesser things so that their child can know the pleasure of greater things.

A young child will ask if they can stay up late to play another round of their video game. The wise parent will discern if their child needs sleep more than pleasure.

A teenager will ask if they can go to a party with their friends. A wise parent will discern what kind of supervision this party will have and what the curfew will be.

Good parenting depends on the wisdom of knowing your children and having their best interest in mind. Our Heavenly Father knows the thoughts and intents of each one of our hearts. He knows the difference between what we want and what we need.

1 John 5:15 (ESV)

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.

Our confidence in prayer is that God knows what we need more than we do. CS Lewis said that prayer doesn’t change the mind of God, but it can change ours.

It can be mysterious as to why God answers some prayers in counterintuitive ways. Why wouldn't the LORD heal a sick child, or reconcile a troubled marriage? How could the LORD'S will be otherwise?

We pray for peace; we pray for help for someone in need; we pray for the salvation of a loved one. Those prayers are not selfish or meant just for our own well being.

Most of us understand why God doesn't give us everything that ask for by impulse. The noble prayers are the ones that puzzle us when they appear to go unanswered.

This is where humility and trust come in. I see no fathomable reason why the LORD doesn't intervene to right a wrong or to bring about a good resolution to a real problem or dilemma.

I have to trust that the LORD sees the full rippling affect to every action and for every situation.

If this morning you are deeply burdened by difficulties that are so big that only God can resolve them, then by all means bring your request to God.

He will hear your prayer. He will respond to your request. He will answer it according to His will.

The skeptic will say that the escape clause in this passage is the part about God's will. Why pray when God or fate will have the final say? **We pray because God tells us to.**

When you come before the throne of grace, we are told to come boldly with confidence. In Christ you are welcome and expected to bring your requests to God.

He is the giver of every good gift. He is also the one who gives and takes away. We learn to trust Him even when His will is different from ours.

Can you do that today? It takes real humility to rely on the one who knows the end from the beginning, because it's an acknowledgment that you don't control the most important matters of life.

Confidence in prayer is knowing the sovereign God who does not allow a hair to fall from your head without His knowledge and will. **Your confidence is in Christ.**

How appropriate it was for shepherds to be the first to welcome the newborn king in Bethlehem. JESUS would grow up to be the Good Shepherd, who knows his sheep and protects each one of them.

Our second point deals with protection from the evil one.

1 John 5:18(ESV)

We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.

Like in our first point, disclaimers are necessary. This is not saying that believers are without sin. It's not saying that if you sin you have lost your salvation.

It's telling us that as the Shepherd of our souls, the LORD watches over His people. He delivers us from evil. He protects us from the evil one.

The classic example of that is with Job. The sovereign LORD allowed Satan to inflict Job with many afflictions, but only to a certain point.

The world may be Satan's domain, but the evil one is not sovereign. He has power, but He has no attributes that rival God. He is not omnipotent, omniscient, or omnipresent.

JESUS told Peter on the night that He was betrayed:

Luke 22:31-32 (ESV)

"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat,³² but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."

The LORD watches over His flock. He protects His people. He doesn't shield you from every hardship, but He will never leave or forsake you.

There is mentioned here a sin that leads to death. We're not even to pray about such a sin. John says that all wrongdoing is sin, but not every sin leads to a spiritual death.

The unforgivable sin is the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit; the hardening of the heart that rejects the Gospel.

That doesn't mean that you can commit any sin you want as long as you believe in JESUS.

All sin is wrongdoing. All sin does damage to yourself and to those around you. If you excuse any sin in your life as no big deal, you set yourself up for all kinds of turmoil and chaos.

David was a man after God's own heart, but he made the latter part of his life far more miserable than it needed to be because of his sin.

But the point for today is that the LORD will protect those who belong to Him. **If you find yourself outside of God's will, He will provide you with the grace to repent and to change course before you make a shipwreck of your life.**

If the damage has already been done, God's grace is greater than your sin. **But you must turn from your sin and forsake it, you can't make excuses for it.**

The evil one would love to put asunder what God has joined together. He would destroy in a moment what took years to build up. He would have you despair your life and give up on your faith.

But God is faithful. He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion. He will watch over your life. He will protect you from the evil one.

For some here, that's the only thing that you can hang onto now as you pray for a loved one who has wandered from the faith.

If your loved one truly belongs to the LORD, remember the promise, that greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world.

On Christmas Eve, I'll be preaching a message that I've titled, "A Prodigal's Christmas." It will be for those who have heard the Good News of the Gospel, but have gone on to other things.

Thankfully we have a good shepherd who goes after those who have wandered away from the flock, and he protects us from the evil one.

John gives us his final exhortation in verses 20 & 21.

1 John 5:20-21 (ESV)

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. ²¹ Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

There are basically three themes in the book of I John. **Believe** the Gospel, **love** one another, and **know** that you have the gift of eternal life. John ends his book with this seemingly unrelated exhortation.

Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

How does that relate to those three verbs, **believe, love and know**? That should be very clear to us all, especially this time of year.

Idols are false gods that we construct to take the place of the one true God who is absolutely holy.

If you believe that any man made thing will meet anything more than a functional need, you're being deceived. All of the Christmas gifts that you give or receive can never meet the deep needs of your soul.

If you depend upon the love of any other person, place or thing more than the love of God in the Gospel, you have set yourself up to have your heart broken.

Idols can be anything that we rely on more than God. Idols diminishes your capacity to truly love others. It is the Gospel that deepens your ability to sacrificially love others.

Believe. Love. Know.

1 John 5:13 (ESV)

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.

Idols make the gift of eternal life look like a throw away white elephant present that is opened on Christmas and quickly discarded.

The gift of God in the Gospel is the immeasurable value of eternal life with God. Idols will make you scoff at that. **Are you scoffing?**

Is there anything more important to you than knowing that your soul has eternal value? Without the Gospel, you can be sentimental about spiritual things, but that's about as deep as you can go.

It's like having a 1,000 friends on Facebook, but waking up feeling the emptiness of your soul. Some of you are there right now.

Knowing that you have received the gift of God in the Gospel is having the assurance that no matter what transpires in this transient world, you **are**, and **always will be** deeply loved.

You are a part of a spiritual family that goes beyond number. You will one day become a part of a crowd of witnesses that tell of the Savior's love for His people.

And like the angels, you too can sing Gloria, in excelsis Deo. Do you have that assurance? Join me in giving thanks to God for the gift of JESUS Christ.