

Confident before God

Are you confident before God? Sounds a bit arrogant, right? Who are we to be confident before the God of the universe? And yet, John is inviting us into a confident relationship with God. In fact, this is the heart of this whole letter. John's letter is written with the purpose of fostering a confident faith in those who truly know God. In our passage today, he focuses especially on two foundational areas of our relationship with God – eternal life and prayer. John doesn't want us to be hesitant and unsure when it comes to eternal life and prayer; he wants us to be confident before God.

Opening Discussion: Growing up did you tend to be confident, timid, or a mix of both? Explain.

Read 1 John 5:13-17

1. What kind of confidence does John want us to have?
2. What difference does it make for one to know he or she has eternal life?
3. How might confidence in having eternal life lead to confidence in prayer? Is there a connection?
4. John says that our confidence in prayer is connected to praying according to God's will (v. 14). And so, how do we develop a prayer life where we increasingly pray according to God's will? What does it mean to ask for something that is according to God's will?
5. How does what John writes here compare to your current experience of prayer?

Steve said:

We need to acknowledge that we don't (and can't) know the will of God exhaustively. There will be times when we are convinced that we're praying according to the will of God when we don't get what we've asked. Even when we have asked according to God's will, when and how God answers might be very different than what we've envisioned. Over the years I've seen people pray for something very, very specific and treat it as a litmus test of whether or not God answers prayer. When their prayer isn't answered as they'd envisioned it, it's devastating for their faith. I'm not saying, "Don't trust God for specific, tangible things." I'm saying, "Don't trust in your prayer; trust that God hears you and will answer if what you've asked is aligned with his will." In other words, your faith is in the power and the goodness and of God.

6. What's your response to what Steve says here?

7. What are some prayers that you know would be according to God's will? How can you make these prayers a more consistent part of your life?

Steve said:

I think that "a sin not leading to death" is any sin that a genuine believer in Jesus commits. John has established repeatedly that "whoever has the Son has eternal life" (1 John 5:12). When we sin we don't forfeit eternal life; our sin doesn't lead to eternal, spiritual death. When we sin we experience conviction by the Holy Spirit, we humble ourselves and confess our sin to God (who is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and cleanse us), and then keep walking in the light. This leads us back to the point John is making in this verse: When we see fellow believers commit some sin, the first/primary thing we do is pray for them. We don't gossip about them. We don't get in their face with angry and judgmental words. We pray to our heavenly Father who has the power to restore and give life. Eventually, after we've done business with God about our own motives and about analogous sins in our lives (Matt. 7), we approach the sinning person with gentleness (Gal. 6:1-2) in order to restore them. But John's point is that we should "ask, and God will give him life" - a deeper experience of eternal life. This is something we can begin practicing immediately. Chances are that you will see a fellow believer commit some sin this coming week. This verse suggests that your prayers might be the very thing that prompts God to do a deep work in their life.

8. Is this aspect of praying according to God's will currently part of your prayer life? Explain.

9. What is your main application from this study?