

TL:DR Pray, God Hears.

1st John 5:14-21

John 17:1-26

Hebrews 4:4-16

Responsive Jeremiah 29:11-15

We have come a long way, here we are now finishing up our 3rd book in this past year. I think that next we will look at 2nd and 3rd John and use that as a kind of summary to cover over and hit some of the high points that we have gone through as we studied this book. I may end up doing just a one week kinda of on off sermon on Jude since it is so short and follows up nicely with these books written by John.

After that I am planning on going into Philippians just to give you a heads up as to where we are heading, in case you were curious Aaron :) We started out in Galatians with Paul's writing, we went to James writing and now have been in John's for a few months and I thought we would go back to one of Paul's letters for awhile. So that all being said, let us start this morning by reading our passage in John, Chapter 5

So up to this point, John has been instructing us what constitutes true faith, what true faith is, and what true faith looks like. He also instructs us about those who are false prophets, deceivers, and those who come in the spirit of Anti-Christ. Having completed John's tests of true faith, The test of right doctrine, the test of Obedience to God, and the test of Love we see how these all go hand in hand working in and through the life of the believer. If we are to rightly claim the cross of Christ we can not deny any of these 3 things but rather must be fully immersed in all 3. We must have correct doctrine about who God is, what he has done, and what our response to him needs to be, which then leads into obedience.

How do we know what to obey, if we do not understand God and his teachings, correct doctrine, if we deny any of the teachings of scripture then we can not claim to have true obedience to the Father. For his says that his children obey his words, and keeps his commandments. But why do we keep his commandments? Why do we Obey? It is because of Love... love toward the father for his saving grace, for his tender mercy toward us that while we hated him, he sent his Son to die for us so that we may become his children.

Love is what binds it all together, true doctrine is founded in love toward each other, and those around us, obedience to God, and to those that God has put in authority over us is also done out of love. That is why John can say in verse 3 here of chapter 5, that God's commandments are not burdensome to us. We keep them, because we love him and our hearts seek his good pleasure, we seek what he desires for us knowing that he is a caring and loving father.

This brings us to verse 14 here today, which says, “ Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.” So it seems that Christianity today, what is being taught today is that God pretty much is a cosmic Santa Claus who is just waiting to shower you with gifts if you only but ask for them. If you would like a new car, or a new house, or better job, if you don't have it, it is only because you aren't asking in faith! But what does this verse say...”that if we ask anything according to His will.”

Once again, it isn't our will, it isn't necessarily what we want, or what we think we need but rather it is what God wills for us. This is not unlike what James was talking about in his book. Turn

with me to James 4:13.

We will see here where our will aligns with Gods, and what our proper response should be. “Come now, you who say, Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit. Whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. AND here is the key, and how it links back to verse 14 in John, Instead you ought to say, If the lord wills, we shall live and do this or that. But now you boast in your arrogance, all sch boasting is evil.

This idea that God is a cosmic Santa Claus just waiting for us to ask so he can bless us, is nothing more then selfish boasting in our arrogance. To think that the almighty sovereign God who is the creator of all, is hindered by our measly desire, or faith is nothing but true arrogance. James says that all such things are evil, this is not a trait of God's children, this is a selfish arrogance that comes from a false faith. You do not have not because you do not have faith, you do not have because God has not seen yet to grant it to you.

Going back to John, chapter 5 verse 14, lets read it again with this passage in James here in mind. “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to his will He hears us. This is the 3rd time in this book that John says that we can have confidence. In chapter 2:28 he says, “And now little children, abide in him, that when he appear we may have confidence and not be ashamed before him at his coming.”

If we are abiding in Christ, if we are keeping his commandments, then we can have confidence that when he comes again, he will not be coming to judge us for our sins, but that he will see Christ blood which covers our sins, and Christ abiding in us, and us in him, as he abides in his father so we will pass from death to life. That is how we can have confidence not only in death, but in our life now knowing that even if we were to die, to die is gain for we will then be united with our Father in heaven.

The 2nd time that John mentions being confident is not unlike the first, but this time he is saying we can have confidence in claim to faith that it is true. Chapter 2, starting in verse 19 “And by this we know that we are of the truth,” by this we know we can have confidence that our faith is not false, but is true. “and by this we shall assure our hearts before Him. For if our heart condemns us, God is greater then our heart and knows all things. Beloved if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.

In everything we know that God is sovereign, that he knows all and sees all. If our heart condemns us, if we are struggling with sinful desires or lusts of the flesh, or pride or arrogance we know that no matter how difficult and powerful that sin may seem to weigh you down God is greater then our heart. God is greater then our desires, he is greater then ourselves and not only that he promises that he will deliver his children from such things. That is how we can have confidence our claim to faith, that is true and not false and we are not self deceived. If when we seem to be overwhelmed with sin, we know that we have a savior who died so that we do not have to be slaves to such things. And we know that God is more powerful then our sin, he is able to take away our sin, and promises to forgive us if we confess and turn from them.

This confession of turning from sin, gives a little insight into what I think the type of prayer, the type of asking according to God's will that John is talking about here. Continuing here, verse 22 of

chapter 3, John talks about asking and receiving from God here also. He says “ Whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep his commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.” When our heart condemns us, when we struggle with sin and desires, or arrogance and pride if we but ask, God will deliver us from it if we are truly his children.

Now this does not mean that we won't struggle with it again, this does not mean that we will be healed from this sin and it will never rear up it's ugly head again. No what he is saying here is that God will grant us the grace, and strength to get through what we are going through right now, at this time. And we can have confidence toward God in this, for if we ask anything according to his will, such as deliverance from sin, he will grant it.

So, now that we look at this verse, one could ask the question. Why then do we even pray, why bother since God is sovereign, if his will is not bent toward us because of our will, desires, or faith then what is the point of asking God for anything? Well John Stott has a good answer to that question. He said “ Prayer is not a convenient device for us to impose our will upon God, or for bending his will to our own, but rather it is the prescribed way of subordinating our will to his. It is by prayer that we seek God's will, we embrace it and align ourselves with it. Every true prayer is a variation on the theme of “your will be done”

So you see, it is just as James wrote, Just as we should not in our arrogance say that I am going to do such and such but rather we should say if the Lord wills. It is the same with prayer. We do not pray demanding God to bend to us, to grant us what we desire but we pray to seek his will for us, and to make our petitions known to him. The example that always comes to mind when I look at this passage in James is the many people we have had inquire about our pastoral position, usually those of a charismatic bent would tell me that they were God's man for us. That they would be our pastor and that our church would grow.

Well, they aren't here,...so I think we can easily discern that their statement was made in arrogance, that James warns about, and not in faith seeking God's will but rather seeking to force and impose their own.

So now another question that comes up. How can we know that we are praying in accordance to God's will? Well, the best way is to not neglect reading scripture, for it is in scripture that we learn about God's desire and will toward his children. Does your prayer align with what scripture teaches? Are praying that God grant your own selfish desires, or are you praying for God to give wisdom and guidance as you seek to find his will in your life.

I am guilty of this myself, and I think we all are. We have a desire, and we pray that God would grant it. And example I could use is in the finding of a pastor. How many years did we pray, and I stand here today telling you I prayed that God would send someone, even though it kept coming back up in my mind that I should just step up and do it I would say.. no, God send someone. Well, God didn't send someone, and here I am now after a whole year still doing this. So now I can look back, and see that my prayer was not after God's will, but rather it was my own. My own selfish desire because I did not want to do it. So in a rather humorous way, God answered everyone's prayer here, that he provide us with a pastor, and he did not grant my prayer for it was God's will for me to be doing this at this time.

So then John goes on to say, here sort of wrapping up his thought on prayer, if we know that God hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him. We do

not always know what God's will is for our life, but we do know in a general way that he desires for us to be obedient and loving children. So our prayers should be seasoned with such obedience and love. Not arrogance demanding our desires, but love, patience and obedience asking God to grant us wisdom, and strength.

But not only that, we can make our desires and petitions known to God, we should be praying for that Job, or promotion, or deliverance from health problems, deliverance from any other trial or hardship that may befall us, but we do so knowing full well that God is sovereign and he will answer our prayers not necessarily in accordance with our will or what we think is best, but rather he will answer them according to his will granting us what he sees is best for us. It is how we react to such things is what shows our faith. If we are not granted deliverance, we do not become angry and curse God, but rather we calmly, and quietly say, “not my will, but yours.”

So moving on this morning, verse 16, “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 no leading to death. There is sin leading to death, I do not say that he should pray about that. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death.”

So the first question that comes to mind when I read this is, what is John talking about here, sin leading to death? It is difficult to discern exactly what he is writing about here, but it seems obvious that those he was writing to would be well aware of what he is talking about because he does not explain it to them. So the best conclusion that I think we can arrive at here, is what he is referring to is probably the exact same thing he has been talking about this entire letter. It is probably unlikely that John is referring to physical death because we all die because of sin. But it seems to make sense to understand this as spiritual death.

In this context I ask again, what is sin that leads to death? If it is to be understood as spiritual death, then it is the sin that is completely incompatible with being born of God. Which John has spent this entire book instructing us about. Blake White put it this way. “Sin that leads to death is deliberately refusing to believe that Jesus is the Christ, refusing to follow God's commands, and refusing to love one's brothers and sisters. John here is talking about those who deny the Son and do not possess the Father, those whose Father is the devil, those who are the spirit of anti-christ.

So John says here, to pray for a brother who is sinning a sin which does not lead to death. So we are to pray for our brothers and sisters who are struggling in sins that are committed unwittingly, They still believe that Jesus is Lord, they still strive to obey, and they seek to love but have been caught up into a snare. John says that we are to pray for them, that God would deliver them from it, but he doesn't just say that we should pray for them he also tell us that God will give him life.

I think this falls right into what John said in verse 14, If we ask anything according to his will, he will hear us. Praying for each other is part of God's design for his children. Praying for strength, wisdom, or deliverance for our fellow Christian brothers and sisters is praying in accordance to God's will, and as John says we can have confidence that he will hear us.

So the last half of verse 16 I found interesting and rather challenging. As I was studying this, my first initial thought was why would John say here “I do not say that you should pray about that.” That we should not pray for those who are committing sins leading to death. I found this rather difficult and challenge my thoughts about prayer. I do not think it is wrong to pray for those in this world, our friends and family members and those we meet that God may one day do a work of grace in their lives

calling them to himself, and I would have put these people who are committing sin unto death as we defined earlier and just put them in the same group of people as our lost friends and relatives, yet John is telling his readers that he is not saying that we should pray for them.

So I found this curious. Blake White in his commentary gives other examples of such things in scripture pointing to God's instruction to Jeremiah. Turn with me to Jeremiah as we look at a few examples here of God telling Jeremiah not to pray for them. Chapter 7:

For context start in verse 8.

Another example is in Chapter 11, starting in verse 9-14

And the final example we see here in Jeremiah is in Chapter 14, 7-11

So notice, in all 3 of these examples the severity of their rebellion. God had determined to send judgment to Israel for their rebellion against him and he tells his prophet to not even pray for them. Just let that sink in for a minute, oh how we do not even begin to comprehend the severity and ugliness of sin and rebellion against a holy and sovereign God.

The final example that Blake White gave was that of Christ himself, which we read this morning. We saw Jesus in his prayer says that he prays for those that God has given him, he does not pray for the world. Then in verse 20, he says he not only prays for those that are his, but those who will believe because of the witness of those who do believe. So, I think this is a good picture of what John is talking about here. Not instructing his readers to pray for those whose sin is unto death, but rather to pray for each other. So how do we determine that, who do we pray for?

Well from these passages it seems to me that first off we pray for each other, for those who are in the family of God, this is something that we really do not even need to be told to do, but rather just comes naturally. Second, I think that we should be praying for those who are not yet believers. Christ set forth the example of doing this very same thing. We do not know who God has elected, therefore we witness, and we pray making our petitions known to God that he would grant us opportunity to share, and grace and faith to those who hear.

So that brings us to the last group, Remember that John is talking to a group of churches who are dealing with a specific group of people, a specific false doctrine which he says is the Anti-Christ, So it is safe to say that these people, those who deny the son, those who are of the spirit of anti-christ are probably these people that John is telling his readers not to pray for. So I guess that brings up the question, does this apply to us today? Are there people like this? And why should our response to them be?

Well I think we need to make a very important distinction here, between those who are unbelievers, and those who set themselves up as teachers, and hold authority over others. But honestly I think that these cases we see in scripture where these specific groups of people are told to not even pray for someone is actually exceptions and special cases instead of some sort of command or rule. After thinking upon this for quite a while I came to the conclusion for myself, and I qualify that this is my own conclusion, Instead of looking at this passage and thinking this means that we should not be praying for false teachers, false prophets instead I think that we should be.

We should be praying that either God would be gracious to them to show them the error of their

way, and if not that he may silence them for the sake of those they are deceiving and leading astray. This is a hard teaching, because it is asking that God remove these people either by grace, or by judgment.

But we ask such a thing out of concern and love for those who are deceived and who have been lead astray but these false teachers, not out of a spirit of anger, or judgment, but rather out of concern for the lost souls who have been deceived.

So moving on, looking at verse 17 and 18. “All unrighteousness is sin, and there is sin not leading to death. We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him. So just like in chapter 3, John is not saying that God's children will be sinlessly perfect, but rather it is better understood to say that whoever is born of God does not make a practice, or a habit of sin. This is the type of sin that is not leading to death, and this is the type of sin that he instructs us that we pray for each other if we see our brother sinning, and God will give him life, God will deliver.

He says that the wicked one will not touch him. Satan may be able to deceive, he may tempt, but he is never able to snatch God's children from the fathers hand for as he said in Chapter 4, “you are of God little children, and have overcome them because He who is in you is greater then he who is in the world.” Those who have a true, vibrant, real faith in God will not live a life trapped in habitual sin. They may fall, and stumble but they will over come Satan and his temptation because God who is in us, is more powerful, and as John says here, we can be confident that God will hear us.

Verse 19, “We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.” Satan is not to be trifled with, while those who are in Christ need not fear Satan who as no power over them, He does have power over those who are in the world. This is a stark reminder that there are only 2 categories of people in this world. Those who are of Christ, and those who are of the Devil. There is not a 3rd category, there is no room for good lost people, there is no room for those to work off their sin in some sort of limbo, or reincarnation. You are either God's child, or you are a Child of Satan.

Satan's domain, his rule is in this world and those who are of this world are trapped in bondage to him. But as Christ said, “ Fear not for I have overcome the world.” We can see in the next verse how God has overcome the world. Verse 20. And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

He has overcome the world by saving us out of the world, notice this is not something we decide to do on our own, but it says here that the Son of God has come, and has given us an understanding. We can not understand God, and his gospel message unless it has been given to us to do so. He gives us this understanding so that we may know Him, and we who know him, we whom God in his grace and sovereign will has elected abide within Christ who is the true son, and true God, who is and who gives, eternal life.

God has crushed the head of the serpent of old, Satan may have this world, but God rules and reigns eternity and he is calling his children from Satan's domain and calling on them to worship him, to be set apart from this world and to live a holy and righteous life as witnesses and minsters to the word of life that is in us. This world is passing away, God has already over come it, he has already defeated the devil. Turn with me to James, chapter 5: 1-8

Thank God for his revelation to us, for his Son who has come to grant us understanding so that we may be saved from this dying corrupt world.

Lastly, looking at the last verse here, it seems kind of odd and out of place. “ Little Children, keep yourselves from idols. There has been no mention of idol until this final verse here. It almost seems that John is starting up a completely new topic but then just drops it. But instead of being something different, I think he really is just finishing up and closing out his train of thought. Anything that is put before God is an idol. John spends much of this writing here refuting false teachers, the Gnostics who deny Christ and instead build up man's intellect as an idol.

But instead of just saying to keep ourselves from this false teaching, John is telling his readers to keep ourselves away from anything that takes the focus, or that would lead us astray from the one true God. We must guard ourselves to not be deceived into following, trusting, or obeying anyone other than the one true God and his Son. Nothing it seems has changed from the time that John wrote this, till today, People have created for themselves their own personal idea of Jesus, not the sovereign Lord of scripture, but of one of their own making, one who makes them feel comfortable. They do not see God as wrathful toward those who are rebellious sinners, but rather like to see him as the all loving, all forgiving cosmic Santa Claus who is there to grant their wishes and desires.

They have built themselves a false God, and this self created identity of this god that they worship is an idol. Yes I know exactly what I am saying, our churches today are full of those claiming Christ, claiming a belief in God but are not worshipping the God of the bible, but rather they are worshipping an idol of their own making. This is no different then what we see here with the Gnostics, denying the true God, and creating their own.

Ben Merkle wrote, “ The ending of John's letter reiterates and emphasizes the main point of his letter and should not be read as introducing a new thought. That is, John is stating that those who fail the three tests mentioned throughout the letter (the test of belief, righteousness, and love) are, in essence, guilty of idolatry. To embrace a form of Christianity that allows one to deny the truth about Jesus, not live a godly life, or not love others, is to create an idol- and that is something all Christians must constantly guard themselves against.

Test your faith, be sure that you are believing in the true God of scripture, and not the one of your own choosing, not one of your own creation. And if you are, then you can be confident when Christ returns and not be ashamed because we have his imputed righteousness, Be confident in your faith, for The God who has granted you knowledge and faith so that you may know him will not leave nor forsake you. And lastly be confident in your prayers for the same God who has given his Son to die for you, who has called you to him will also hear you.