

1 John 5:13-15

¹³I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

¹⁴This is the confidence that we have before him: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. ¹⁵And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we also know that we receive the things we have asked from him.

Confidence

I.

Are you filled with confidence?

Visualize yourself in a classroom. The teacher is up front—the authority figure. Sitting nearby are other students; some are your friends, some just acquaintances. Perhaps there are some you don't like very much and some who don't like you, either.

You sit there listening, but the material is just not sinking in. You don't get it. As you look around, there don't seem to be other confused faces. Are you the only one? Should you raise your hand and ask a question?

It might be embarrassing. Perhaps there was something in yesterday's homework that you failed to do that should have helped you understand. Maybe this is really simple stuff, but you don't get it. If you ask a question in class, everyone might think you're a bit dense. There might be an audible sigh from the teacher because all of this had been explained so many times before.

To ask, or not to ask? That is the question. You *need* to know; your grade is going to hinge on knowing the material. There might be something tomorrow that builds on today's information so somehow, some way, you need answers.

One of your friends in the class is really good in this subject. Rather than risk ridicule from the rest of your classmates, or disappointment from the teacher, you have greater confidence in going to your friend.

Most students don't ask the teacher every little thing. The teacher is kept in reserve for the really important things, or for answers you just can't get anywhere else. The teacher doesn't have time for your simple questions; you'll have to look those up on your own. The teacher isn't going to have patience with you when you ask for the thousandth time; you should have gotten the message by now.

Your *friend*, on the other hand, is a well you can dip into again and again. You've already spent hours together just talking. You talk about anything and everything. A friend is someone who doesn't have some unrealistic expectations of you. When it comes time to ask for advice or seek answers to a challenging situation, it's easy to go to your friend. In fact, you can ask your friend about *anything*, no matter how small and insignificant.

II.

Today's sermon text talks about prayer. It talks about asking questions of God. When you go to God, are you asking your questions as an intimidated student, or are you asking as if God is a close, personal friend?

Guilt might affect our relationship with God. Just like students who haven't done their homework, we are intimidated to come to God in prayer. Just like students who assume they are expected to handle most things on their own, we assume God doesn't want to be

bothered with our petty issues and we think we have to wait to pray for the really, really big things.

Guilt is especially a problem when we look at John's words from earlier in this chapter. He writes: "This is love for God: that we keep his commands" (1 John 5:3, EHV). We haven't done what we are supposed to have done. Sitting there in the classroom you shrink down in your chair, hoping the teacher won't notice you and won't call on you because you have no excuses.

God starts his commands with loving him above all things, but so many other things and so many people are out there to get in the way. Sometimes friends and family and activities get in the way of our relationship with God.

God's commands continue with all the ways we are to treat others. But we feel guilty because we know that sometimes we lie and cheat and steal. Though God tells us to be content with what we have, sinful desires often mean that we covet what someone else has.

John starts today's reading: "I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God" (1 John 5:13, EHV). We *do* believe. But the guilt of all our failures starts to turn our belief in Jesus into an academic exercise rather than a close, personal relationship. God becomes unapproachable, like a stern teacher.

All that guilt conspires to make our prayer life flat. We don't go to God because we know we don't *deserve* for God to hear our prayers and answer them.

III.

The funny thing about asking friends rather than teachers is that teachers generally *don't* mind being asked. They *want* their students to learn the material and understand what is being taught. They would rather have you ask *them* than a friend who may or may not have a better understanding than you do. Even if you didn't do the work thoroughly the first time, they want you to learn. Even if you have asked a dozen times, they'll answer your question again.

"I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13, EHV). You *are* a believer. You know the name of the Son of God. You know that his name is Jesus. You know that Jesus *died* to pay for all your sins. You know that the guilt of not following God's commands has been paid in full. You know that you have eternal life because of what Jesus has done for you.

It is sure. It is certain. It has been finished by Jesus, just as he announced before he died on the cross. Like the teacher who is willing to answer your questions again and again, Jesus pulls you close yet again so that you may know you have eternal life.

"This is the confidence that we have before him: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us" (1 John 5:14, EHV).

What *is* God's will? Do you know? It's in the Bible.

Maybe you have been a believer since childhood. Perhaps you have read the Bible, cover to cover, several times. Good. Does that mean you will know and understand the will of God perfectly? No. Paul says: "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how untraceable his ways!" (Romans 11:33, EHV). No matter how much you have studied, there is more to learn. No matter how close your relationship, God's will is still unsearchable and untraceable.

So. How can we have confidence?

Talk with him regularly, just like you do with your other close, personal friends. You will be confident that you know what his plans are for your life when you listen to what he says

in his Word on a regular basis.

John says: “And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we also know that we receive the things we have asked from him” (1 John 5:15, EHV). God *always* answers prayer.

I like to say that God never answers your prayer with a “no.” His answers are always “yes” or, “maybe later” or, “I’ll give you something better.”

God’s “yes” answers are always satisfying to us. When we realize that his answer was a “yes,” we are gratified to learn that we have asked according to his will.

“Maybe later” answers remind us of Jesus’ parable about a persistent widow who kept badgering an unjust judge. Finally she wore him down and the judge granted her request. While God is completely just, sometimes the exercise of coming again and again in prayer before him refines *our* understanding of what we are really praying for. Finally in our prayers we bring *our* will into line with *his*. “Maybe later” gives us time to understand what a great blessing his answers always are.

“I’ll give you something better” is a difficult one. God’s idea of “something better” doesn’t always line up with ours. God will never give us something that is harmful to us or our faith. God knows our needs better than we know them ourselves. He will *always* answer according to what is best for us, no matter how we might understand it at the time.

IV.

“This is the confidence that we have before him: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us” (1 John 5:14, EHV).

Maybe you haven’t always been confident to go to the Lord in prayer and ask him about anything and everything. Maybe in the past you have kept God in reserve to be a last resort when all your own attempts have come up short.

Don’t wait to change. Have confidence to go to God in prayer with anything. Paul said to the Romans: “The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we should pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that are not expressed in words” (Romans 8:26, EHV). Don’t worry that your questions might be too trivial. Even if you don’t quite know how to ask or what to ask, ask anyway. Say in your prayers, “not my will, but yours be done,” and carry on with your prayer, knowing that the Holy Spirit will express your prayers to the Heavenly Father in words that are beyond your comprehension.

Luther put it this way: “Wherever there is a Christian, there is none other than the Holy Spirit, who does nothing but pray without ceasing. Even though one does not move one’s lips and form words continuously, one’s heart nonetheless does beat incessantly, like the pulse and the heart in the body” (Luther’s Works, Vol 24, p. 89). Keep God and his Word and his will at the forefront of your mind and your prayers will flow out of you even when you don’t think about it. You don’t have to think to breathe. Grow so close to your Lord and Savior that you don’t even have to think to pray.

Pray always with confidence. Amen.