

The Epistle of First John

Lesson Twelve

A Confident Life (1 John 4:6-5:21)

Prayer and Assurance – 1 John 5:14-21)

Introduction:

- I. One of the reasons John wrote this epistle was to give all believers confidence.
 - A. We should never wrestle with doubts concerning our relationship with God.
 1. We have been born again and have been baptized into Christ.
 2. That grants us the privilege of being children of God – blessed with innumerable spiritual blessings.
 - B. Therefore, John attempts to give all believers confidence.
 1. Confidence that our prayers will be heard and answered according to God's will.
 2. Confidence that those born of God do not continuously practice sin.
 3. Confidence that the world under the power of the devil does not know.
 4. Confidence that Jesus Christ has come into the world.
- II. We know that our prayers will be heard and answered according to God's will.
 - A. However, John addresses two important things about intercessory prayers.
 1. There are those called "a brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death."
 - a. We are encouraged to pray for this brother.
 2. There are those who sin "leading to death."
 - a. John advises that we should not pray for that brother.
 3. There is no sin that cannot be cleansed by the blood of Christ – except one.
 - a. The sin for which the sinner refuses to repent.
 - B. John also assures that one born of God does not sin habitually or persist in sin.
 1. There are two possible reasons.
 - a. God provides divine help in protecting us from the evil one.

- b. We have strength within ourselves to resist the wiles of the devil.
- C. John gives us confidence that we are "of God."
 - 1. This gives us the assurance that we have a unique relationship with God through Jesus Christ that the rest of the world does not have.
- D. Therefore, John concludes with two important thoughts.
 - 1. Through the coming of Jesus Christ into the world we have a unique understanding of the One true God – the giver of eternal life.
 - 2. And finally, we must all beware of any form of idolatry in which we replace the One true God with the shadowy phantoms of false gods put in His place.

Discussion:

- I. Confidence in prayers.
 - A. Will God hear and grant our requests?
 - 1. John's encouraging words should leave no doubts in our minds (1 Jn 5:14-15).
 - 2. The context of the preceding verses explains how we can be confident (1 Jn 5:11-13).
 - a. We have been "born of God" (**1 Jn 5:1**), we "love God and keep His commandments" (**1 Jn 5:2**), and we have a faith that overcomes the world because we believe that "Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (**1 Jn 5:4-5**).
 - 3. This confidence is based on our relationship as a child of God our Father in heaven.
 - B. There are, however, some requirements that must be met on our part to assure God will hear and answer our prayers.
 - 1. We must pray in the name of Christ (by His authority and through Him as our Mediator) (cf. Jn 14:14; Eph 5:20; Col 3:17).
 - 2. We must be "in Christ" and abide in Him (Jn 15:7).
 - 3. We must be obedient to God – faithfully keeping His commandments and doing what is pleasing in His sight (1 Jn 3:21-22).
 - 4. We must always pray according to God's will – following the example of Jesus (Matt 6:10; 26:39; 1 Jn 5:14).

- C. If we pray according to "His will" we know He will hear and answer our prayers (1 Jn 5:15).
 - 1. John's statement, "if we ask anything," "whatever we ask," and "we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him" is comparable to the words of Jesus to His disciples (Mk 11:24).

- II. How can we be confident when praying for others – praying intercessory prayers?
 - A. John addresses two kinds of prayers offered on behalf of a fellow believer (1 Jn 5:16-17).
 - 1. One is a prayer "that does not lead to death."
 - a. We should pray on behalf of those who sin in this manner.
 - 2. The other is a "sin leading to death."
 - a. We should not even pray on behalf of such a person.
 - b. Asking God to forgive an unrepentant sinner will not be answered because it is asking God to act contrary to His holy and divine will (1 Jn 1:6-7; 5:16).
 - B. Some believe John is referring to the so-called "unpardonable sin" – blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Mt 12:31-32; Lk 12:10; Mk 3:28-29).
 - 1. This does not seem to be a sin one can commit today:
 - a. Pharisees were eyewitnesses to Jesus healing a demon possessed man but attributed the power behind the miracle to "Beelzebub."
 - b. Miracle was performed to confirm the deity of Jesus.
 - c. No mention by any of the apostles of the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.
 - d. The sin is not mentioned in any New Testament book or letter after the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
 - 2. Is there any sin today that the blood of Christ cannot forgive?
 - a. Not according to John (1 Jn 1:7, 9).
 - 3. It seems the "sin leading to death" is any sin of which the sinner refused to repent.

4. Unfortunately, some believers become so deeply entrenched in sin that they can no longer repent because of the hardness of their heart (Eph 4:17-19; 2 Pet 2:12-15; Heb 6:4-6; 10:26-30).

III. Three Declarations and a Final Warning.

A. John declares that one born of God does not practice sin (1 Jn 5:18).

1. In context, John addresses the false doctrinal teaching of the Gnostics – sins committed in the flesh are not charged against the spirit.
 - a. John has made this declaration twice before (1 Jn 3:6, 9).
 - b. The tense of the verb "sin" suggests a continual action, as in one who keeps on sinning time after time, or who makes a regular practice of sin.
2. However, textual scholars have debated over the proper interpretation of the phrase "he who has been born of God keeps himself."
 - a. Some suggest one "born of God" is referring to all baptized believers, while contemporary translations suggest the "one born of God" is referring to Christ.
 - b. Some translations also suggest the Christian born of God keeps or guards himself against the wicked one, while contemporary translations indicate that the One born of God (referring to Christ) keeps the baptized believer safe.
 - c. The KJV, NKJV and ASV all agree: "he that was begotten of God keepeth himself."
 - d. Other translations read differently.
 - (1). "He [Christ] who was born of God keeps him" (NASU).
 - (2). "the one who was born of God keeps him safe" (NIV).
 - (3). "he who was born of God protects him" (ESV).
 - e. There are strong arguments on both sides of this debate, especially since the manuscript evidence is divided.
3. However, nearly all agree either reading is acceptable and does not harm the meaning of the text – especially since both ideas are taught elsewhere in the New Testament.

4. Passages where the believer is kept by Christ or by the power of God (Mt 6:13; 2 Thess 3:3; 1 Pet 1:4-5; Jude 24-25; Rev 3:10).
 5. Passages where the believer keeps himself by resisting the evil one (1 Cor 10:12-13; 2 Cor 7:1; Eph 6:11-12; Jas 4:7).
- B. Second, John declares that we are of God (1 Jn 5:19).
1. There is a clear line of demarcation between the realm of God and the realm of the devil.
 - a. The Christian needs to understand that we are the only ones who are "of God" – meaning "belong to God."
 - b. There is no middle ground for the unbeliever or those who have not obeyed the gospel of Christ – one is either saved or lost.
 2. We are children of God because we keep His commandments and therefore have every right to claim the promises made only to those who are born of God.
- C. The third declaration is that the Son of God has come to give us spiritual understanding (1 Jn 5:20).
1. John is declaring three key facts.
 - a. The Son of God has come – come in the flesh in the person of Jesus Christ – and that fact cannot be denied.
 - b. Jesus Christ has come to introduce us to the Him (God the Father) who is true.
 - c. We have entered into a relationship with Jesus Christ – the true God – where we have eternal life.
 2. The "understanding" that the Son of God gives us is more correctly translated "insight" – a process of the mind that leads us to form a conclusion based on certain facts.
 - a. When we read and study the Bible and spend time in meditation and prayer, and as we live our lives in communion with God, we become better acquainted with Him and deepen our knowledge of God so that we can come to know Him that is true.

3. Some question whether the phrase "This is the true God and eternal life" is referring to God the Father or Jesus Christ.
 - a. Most agree that the immediate context is Jesus Christ, as John's way of attributing deity to Him.
 - b. However, no one denies that God the Father is the subject of the overall context and could also be a simple reference back to Him.
- D. John concludes his letter with a final warning (1 Jn 5:21).
 1. In classical Greek the word "idol" has the meaning of "shadow" or "phantom."
 2. John may be warning believers to guard against being deceived by the shadowy phantoms known as "false gods" – as Paul repeatedly warned (1 Cor 8:4-6).
 3. John could also use "idols" to stand for the system of false doctrine that was seducing many brethren to lose faith that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God.
 - a. Since an idol is anything that occupies the place of the One true God, it seems reasonable to use the word to allude to the shadowy phantom of false teaching being promoted by the Gnostics.
 - b. Their doctrine had influenced many believers to substitute belief in the One true God and His Son, Jesus Christ, for a totally false concept of God and a completely distorted view of Jesus.
- E. Finally, the KJV and NKJV follow the Textus Receptus by adding "Amen" to the conclusion of John's first letter.
 1. The closing "amen" only appears in later Greek manuscripts of the letter.
 2. However, it neither adds nor takes away from anything John taught in this epistle.

The Summary:

- I. John urges all believers to have complete confidence in their prayers.
 - A. That assurance includes knowing that if we ask anything according to His will he hears us and will answer according to His will.
 1. However, we must be careful when it comes to intercessory prayers.

- a. We should most certainly pray for those whose sins are not so grievous that there is little or no hope of true repentance.
 - b. However, praying to forgive for those whose heart is so calloused that they cannot or will not repent is a prayer God will not answer.
 2. Although all unrighteousness is sin, there are sins that are of such a nature that the sinner can and should repent of those.
 - a. Those are the ones who should be in our prayers.
- II. Once again, John reminds us that those who are born of God do not consistently practice sin.
- A. There are three important declarations John makes.
 1. We have help from God in overcoming the devil, and we also have the responsibility to exercise restraint in resisting the devil.
 2. We are of God and are no longer under the power of the wicked one like the rest of the world.
 3. We have been blessed with spiritual understanding given to us by the coming of the Son of God – understanding to know the One true God.
 - B. Therefore, the apostle concludes by warning his readers against accepting anything – especially any false or fictitious doctrine – that would replace our faith in the One true God with a false faith in a false god.

Review Questions:

1. How do we know God will hear and answer our prayers?
2. Concerning intercessory prayers:
 - a. When can we pray for a brother?
 - b. When should we not pray?

3. How does John define sin in verse 17?
4. What does it mean that those who are born of God do not sin?
5. What keeps the "wicked one" from harming those born of God?
6. What is the difference between us and the rest of the world according to verse 19?
7. Who is the true God and what do we have through Him?
8. Why did John urge believers to "keep yourselves from idols?"