

There are fewer things that spoil our prayers than lacking the confidence of being heard—we come before God filled with doubts and uncertainty—perhaps doubts concerning our acceptance with God but also doubts concerning the efficacy [value or worth] of prayer—we pray because we know we should, but do we pray confident that our prayers are heard...

But my dear brethren, we find within our text one of the most amazing phrases found anywhere in Scripture—He hears us—He [the God of heaven and earth], hears [is attentive or thoughtful], us [His beloved children]—I’m convinced that most if not all of us need desperately to get these three words deep within our hearts—He hears us—it wouldn’t surprise me if the text said—He hates us—for our sins render us natively hateful—it wouldn’t surprise me if the text said—He tolerates us—for we are prone to wander from Him—but listen my dear Christian friend—just let these three words sink into your minds—He hears us...

Beginning with v14 the apostle writes what might be referred to as a postscript [or appendix]—having supplied his basic purpose behind writing [v13], he now finishes with several practical statements—in vv14-15 confidence in prayer, in vv16-17 praying for an erring brother, in vv18-20 he provides three summary statements all prefaced by the word “know”—v18—“we know that whoever is born of God does not sin...” v19—“we know that we are of God...” v20—“we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding...” and then finally in v21, he provides one last summary exhortation—“little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen...”

Having addressed the subject of assurance of having eternal life in v13, the apostle John now speaks of the assurance of having our prayers answered in vv14-15—not only should believers have confidence they have eternal life, but they should have confidence before God in prayer...

- I. The Context of Confidence—v14a
- II. The Limits for Confidence—v14b
- III. The Results of Confidence—v15
- IV. Three Summary Observations

I. The Context of Confidence—v14a

1. By context I refer to the prepositional phrase rendered “in Him” by the old and new King James translations...
2. The Greek preposition *pros* literally means “to, unto, toward, before, or near...”—it can mean “concerning or with reference to...”
3. I have no idea why the King James translators rendered it “in”—of the 650 times this preposition is used, this is the only place I could find where they did...
4. The NAS has it—“this is the confidence which we have before Him...” likewise the 1901—“and this is the boldness which we have toward him...”
5. That this is the meaning that John here intended seems verified from 1Jn.3:21—“beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God...”
6. Here we find a very similar statement found in our text—“we have confidence toward [*pros*] God...” 5:14 —“the confidence that we have in [*pros*] Him...”
7. Thus the preposition refers more to the context of the confidence than to its source—a confidence that can and should be sustained within the special presence of God...
8. The Greek word translated “confidence” literally means—“freedom of speech...”—it refers to—“a boldness or liberty of speech...”
9. For example, Jn.7:13—“...no one spoke openly of Him for fear of the Jews...”—that is, they lacked a boldness or confidence in proclaiming Him because they feared the persecution of the Jews...
10. We find the same word again in Jn.18:20—“I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues and in the temple...”

11. Our Savior spoke the gospel openly in the synagogues and temple with boldness and without fear of retribution...
12. Thus essential to the word and concept of “confidence” is the absence of fear—the absence of all that would distance us from God...
13. F.F. Bruce—“Here the confidence which is particularly in the writer’s mind is related to the free access and freedom of speech which the children of God enjoy as they come to their Father to present their requests to Him...”
14. Thus the confidence that John here refers to entails a loosening of our tongues before God in prayer—to open our mouths wide before God...
15. Heb.4:16—“Let us therefore come boldly [with confidence] to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need...”
16. The “therefore” refers to the preceding verses, 14-15—“seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* confession. 15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are*, yet without sin...”

II. The Limits for Confidence—v14b

1. In the latter part of v14 we find the limits or restrictions of our confidence—“that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us...”
2. In other words the confidence that we have with reference to God, is that—“if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us...”
3. Thus John refers specifically to a boldness in prayer—a confidence fueled by the knowledge that He will hear us—“if we ask anything according to His will...”
4. Now before I go any further I think it’s obvious that when John says—“He hears us...”—he’s referring to a hearing that is favorable—a hearing associated with answering...
5. For example, Ps.66:18—“If I regard iniquity in my heart [that is, if I look at it with approval], the Lord will not hear [that is, hear it favorably or positively]...”
6. Isa.59:2—“but your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden *His* face from you, so that He will not hear...”
7. In contrast to these passages, John tells us—“this is the confidence that we have in [toward] Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us...”
8. Prov.15:29—“the LORD *is* far from the wicked, but He hears the prayer of the righteous...”—that is, He is near them so as to be concerned with the petitions...
9. Martyn Lloyd-Jones—“It means that His ears are open to us; it means that His heart is enlarged towards us...He is always ready to receive us in audience; we need never have any doubt about that...”
10. Now here it becomes important to rightly understand the phrase—“according to His will...”—what does it mean to ask God “according to” or “in harmony with” His will...
11. Historically we make the necessary distinction between God’s “sovereign” and “revealed” will—His sovereign will is secret and unknown to us and is always without exception done...
12. In contrast to this His revealed will is known within the old and new Testaments and is not always done—not every person does or obeys the Scriptures...
13. For example, 1Jn.2:17—“and the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever...”
14. Notice there are those who do the will of God and there are those who do not, which of necessity can only refer to the revealed will of God as found in Scripture...
15. Matt.6:9—“in this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven...”
16. Here our Savior exhorts us to pray that His will would be done on earth as it is in heaven—again referring to the revealed or preceptive will of God...
17. Jn.9:31—“now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him...”

18. These are the words of a man whose eyes were recently opened by Christ—he is responding to the critical interrogation of the Pharisees...
19. Notice two things—[a] God does not hear sinners—that is, He does not hear in a favorable manner the prayers of the wicked and unconverted...
20. This of course does not deny that He does hear the humble prayer of a penitent sinner, for in Lk.18 the prayer of the publican was heard...
21. But it refers to the fact that God’s ear is turned away from the cry of the unconverted and unconcerned—the hardhearted sinner...
22. Notice [b] God does hear His people—“but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears them...”
23. Notice that doing the will of God is descriptive of being a true worshiper of God—that is one who worships in spirit and truth...
24. Thus by “the will of God” John refer to the revealed will of God as found within the Old and New Testament Scriptures...

III. The Results of Confidence—v15

1. Having identified the restrictions or limitations of confident prayer, John now provides the results or effects of it...
2. V15—“and if we know that he hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him...”
3. In other words—if we have the confidence that He hears us, then we should have the confidence that He will answer our petitions...
4. Now there are two common errors in understanding this verse that must be avoided—[1] there is what’s often referred to as the “faith-word” movement...
5. This movement [represented by Benny Hinn, Kenneth Hagin, and Kenneth Copeland] interprets this text as a blank check upon which we can write any amount we want...
6. Whatever you ask all is needed is that you know that you have it—in other words if you believe hard enough you can actually speak your prayers into existence...
7. Thus you might hear them say—if you ask for a new car—“we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him...”
8. If you ask for a new house, or a new job, or a new body—“we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him...”
9. But this view typically overlooks the limitation of v14—“if we ask anything according to His will, he hears us...”
10. Thus v15 can not be understood as a blank check, as if God is obligated to answer any and everything we ask...
11. But it must be understood in light of v14—“that if we ask anything according to His will...” we have confidence that He will hear us...
12. V15—“and if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him...”
13. But then a [2] error would be to overly clarify the verse until it has little if any actual meaning—this of course is an error more common to most Christians...
14. But my brethren, I think it’s important that we don’t miss the broad extent of this verse—“if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petition that we have asked of Him...”
15. That is, if the prayer is in keeping with His revealed will, we can have confidence He hears it, and if He hears it, He will answer it in His own time and in His own way...
16. In other words—we offer our prayers believing that God is a good Father, who will not refuse His children those things that tend to their good and His glory [see also Mk.11:23-24; Jas.1:5-8]...

IV. Three Summary Observations

A. The heart of God and prayer

1. This first summary statement I glean as a principle taken from the text as a whole—God hears the humble prayers of His believing people...
2. I suggest there exists fewer statements in the entirety of God’s word, that should bring more comfort, confidence, and joy than those three English words—“He hears us...”
3. But in order for these words to have a powerful influence within us, we have the words that precede it in v15—“if we know that He hears us...”
4. In other words, the apostle was concerned that we be assured of the large-hearted nature of God—that His ear is as big as His heart...
5. This past week there was an incident concerning two pit-bulls—three young children had just left their homes on their way to school when they were confronted by these two dogs...
6. Thus the children began to cry out for their mother, who at first thought they were yelling because they had forgotten something...
7. But when she looked and saw her three children being attacked by these dogs, she took off her shoe and stood between the dogs and her children...
8. How cruel that mother would have been, if, after hearing the cries of her children, she turned a deaf ear to their needs...
9. Now here I want to spend a few minutes reading several statements throughout the Psalms that wed together our cries and His ear...
10. “Have mercy on me, and hear my prayer...Hear, O LORD, *when* I cry with my voice! Have mercy also upon me, and answer me...Hear the voice of my supplications When I cry to You, When I lift up my hands toward Your holy sanctuary...Hear, O LORD, and have mercy on me; LORD, be my helper...Hear my prayer, O LORD, And give ear to my cry; Do not be silent at my tears...HEAR my cry, O God; Attend to my prayer...Hear my voice, O God, in my complaint; Preserve my life from dread of the enemy...I am in trouble; Hear me speedily...Bow down Your ear, O LORD, hear me; For I *am* poor and needy...Hear my prayer, O LORD, And let my cry come to You...I cry out with *my* whole heart; Hear me, O LORD! I will keep Your statutes...Lord, hear my voice! Let Your ears be attentive To the voice of my supplications...”
11. But I suggest that the Lord does more than merely hears the cries or prayers of His people but He in fact delights in them...
12. Prov.15:8—“the sacrifice of the wicked *is* an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright *is* His delight...”
13. We find the same truth in those words of Christ to His church in Song 2:14—“O my dove...let me see your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice *is* sweet, and your face *is* lovely...”
14. I have a pastor friend in Michigan who will often say to me—It is good to hear your voice...”—and what a joy it is to have something actually glad to hear my voice...
15. But my brethren, what is this compared to the desire of our Savior—“let me hear your voice...for your voice is sweet...”
16. Is there any greater motive possible to pray than Christ wants to hear my voice—that He considers my voice as sweet...

B. The qualifications for prayer

1. The second summary statement concerns another principle gleaned from our text—the Scripture qualifies what kind of prayers the Lord answers...
2. The apostle tells us with absolute clarity, that we can have confidence before God, if we ask anything according to His will...
3. This of course teaches us that God wants us to know how to pray—how to petition Him in such a way so as to be heard...
4. Now as I understand it, the Scriptures provide several other similar qualifications necessary to have our prayers heard or answered...
5. Notice [1] prayer must be believing, Matt.21:22—“and whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive...”

6. In other words, prayer must be offered from a believing and persistent heart—a heart driven by a confident fervency...
7. Notice [2] prayer must be in Christ' name, Jn.14:13-14—"and whatever you ask in my name, that I will do...if you ask anything in my name, I will do it..."
8. What is it to pray in Christ name, but to pray for Christ' sake—to pray through and because of Christ's merit...
9. We don't ask God for anything because we deserve it—but we ask for the sole purpose of Christ' blood and righteousness...
10. Now I trust it's obvious that this does not necessitate the actual phrase—"in Jesus name..."—providing that the prayer was offered to God for the sake of Christ...
11. But it refers to petitions offered conscious of our own sinfulness and Christ' sufficiency—prayers offered at the back of our great High Priest...
12. Notice [3] prayer must be in fellowship with Christ, Jn.15:7—"If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you..."
13. What does our Savior mean by abiding in Him and His words abiding in us, but that we dwell in a close and abiding intimacy with Him...
14. J.C. Ryle—"There are some Christians whose prayers are more powerful and effectual than those of others. The nearer a man lives to Christ, and the closer his communion with Him, the more effectual will his prayers be..."
15. James said the same thing in Jas.5:16—"the hardworking prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much..."
16. Thus to come to v15 and interpret it as a blank check, without any thought or consideration of these qualifications is utter nonsense...

C. The word of God and prayer

1. Here I refer to the obvious relation that exists between our prayers and God's will—in other words our prayers must be motivated and saturated with His word...
2. Notice [1] our prayers must be in harmony to the precepts of God's word—by this I mean we ought to pray for the very things that God commands us to do...
3. For example, 1Thess.4:3—"for this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality..."
4. In other words, it is the revealed will of God for us that we be a holy people—that we abstain from moral impurity...
5. Thus when we bow our heads in prayer, we ought to plead with confidence that God would make us a holy people—this is His will for me...
6. Notice [2] our prayers must be fueled by the promises of God's word—by this I mean our prayers must be driven by specific promises given found within His revealed will...
7. Children's Catechism—"Q. What is prayer? A. Prayer is asking God for things which He has promised to give..." (cp.Ps.119:49)...
8. Neh.1:5-7—"and I said: "I pray, LORD God of heaven, O great and awesome God, *You* who keep *Your* covenant and mercy with those who love *You* and observe *Your* commandments, 6 "please let *Your* ear be attentive and *Your* eyes open, that *You* may hear the prayer of *Your* servant which I pray before *You* now, day and night, for the children of Israel *Your* servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against *You*. Both my father's house and I have sinned. 7 "We have acted very corruptly against *You*, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances which *You* commanded *Your* servant Moses..."
9. Neh.1:8-9—"remember, I pray, the word that *You* commanded *Your* servant Moses, saying, '*If* you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations; 9 '*but if* you return to *Me*, and keep *My* commandments and do them, though some of you were cast out to the farthest part of the heavens, *yet* I will gather them from there, and bring them to the place which I have chosen as a dwelling for *My* name..."

