

Reading: 1 John 3:11-24

Theme: Confidence in Prayer.

John wrote this letter to encourage, strengthen and establish these believers in their faith and beliefs which they had heard from the apostles' own lips. They were taken back to basics, to show that their foundations were secure and they were to build upon them i.e. live these out their Christian lives. In the midst of this 2nd cycle of tests John, as a wise and caring pastor, breaks off from the searching and probing tests to deal with fears and anxieties that may have arisen in his readers lives. At this point he wrote concerning the condemning heart - hearts that were truly seeking God and God's ways, but were so sensitive these truths could wrongly condemn and cripple the lives of Christians who were truly delighting in God and the things of God.

In v19-24 John covers 3 areas - assurance of heart, confidence in prayer and the presence of the Lord. Last time we considered **1. Assurance of Heart** (v19) - our condemning hearts could be put to rest and soothed, even as we consider God and His awesomeness. We noted that the way to silence our condemning hearts as believers is to be willingly searched by God and even as we are shown our sin, faults and failings, we remember Him - His love, grace and mercy and we put 1 John 1:9 into action in our lives by faith. John links this assurance and quieting of our heart to evidences of grace, especially in actively loving our brothers and sisters in Christ. That is how v19 begins, by linking to what John has written about love for our Christian brothers and sisters. John does not leave it there, but moves on to deal with other benefits from loving our brothers and sisters and goes on to speak of

confidence in prayer and the presence of God with us. This evening we will look at:

2. Confidence in Prayer. (v21ff)

John again addressed these ones as “*Beloved*” (“*dear friends*” in NIV is a weak translation). These ones were the αγαπητος = “loved ones”. This was not just a polite term, but truly meant by John and this is how we are to view and regard other believers - loved by God and therefore loved by us in keeping with God’s command. John then moves on to say “*if our hearts do not condemn us*” we have assurance, confidence. It is not referring to those who are deceiving themselves, or have hardened their hearts, but only to those who have silenced their hearts by God’s means and provisions, who are actively loving their brothers and sisters and seeking to live righteously.

John is not speaking here of arrogance or presumption, but is speaking of a confidence we are not only to have as a theory, but to enjoy as a reality in our lives. Commentators agree that now we are in the realm of prayer as v22 makes clear, but there are some commentators who suggest we have been in the realm of prayer since v19 and we continue in that realm until v24. It may not necessarily be so, but what we are to recognise is that if these things are true of us in prayer, then they will be the better enjoyed and lived out in our everyday lives. In prayer we cannot bluff, cannot prattle away with grandiose words, with hypocritical speech - for God sees past all those to our very hearts and that is why we need “*hearts at rest in His presence*” (v19), so we can have “*confidence before God*” (v22). We can fool people, keep up pretences,

but on our own before God, that and that alone is what we are and He is greater than our deceitful hearts, He is not fooled, nor His eyes taken up with what we appear to be, but He knows us through and through. We cannot bluff our way with God in prayer. I have 2 areas to note concerning this confidence:

A. Confidence in Approaching God.

We go to God in prayer, whether we kneel or not - there we are in prayer. Kneeling is one of the right postures in prayer, but it is not our bodily position that really matters, but our heart's position – at rest in His presence. This is not presumption or arrogance. We come with bold confidence to God in prayer as we read in Hebrews 4:16 *“Let us then approach the throne of grace with **confidence**, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”*

We need to keep emphasising and realising that prayer is not just a matter of saying words, however finely worded, whatever religious sentiments they say, not even using ‘Thee’ and ‘Thou’ - else in many languages they would not be able to pray!

Prayer is coming with confidence into the very presence of the Almighty God of the whole universe as we see in v19 *“in His presence”* or *“before God”* in v21. We are not to think of it as saying our words here on earth and they somehow get beyond our lips, minds or hearts, pass through the ceiling, then the sky and eventually get to God. We are always in God's presence at all times, whether we realise it or not. Sometimes, they are glorious times, we are aware of the awesomeness of it, but other times we are not so. Because and

only because of our relationship with the Lord Jesus as our Saviour are we allowed into the presence of God. We are not there to beg for a hearing, not trying to win God over on to our side, not even to try and appease Him. We go there as His beloved ones; His children and we are accepted only because of who we are in the Lord Jesus - accepted in Him as He has dealt with our sin and failures. Jesus is the only reason and the only way we can go to this awesome God in prayer with bold confidence.

We can go into the presence of God, before Him with the confidence of a child to its father - a loving, caring and good father and as Christians we go to the best and perfect Father and we can truly say "*Our Father...*" He is our Father who is in heaven and we need to reverence and respect Him - "*hallowed be your name*", but we come with confidence and boldness, not because of what we've done or not done, or even how we feel, but because our Saviour did all we need and He, His person, work and the grace evidences of His work, gives us assurance of a heart at peace with God, of acceptance and to go into the presence of the awesome God with confidence as His child.

What an amazing and thrilling privilege and honour we have in prayer. We are to go with this assured confidence that we are accepted in the Beloved and therefore welcome at the throne of grace at any time and there at the throne of grace we get mercy and grace to help us in time of need. Queen Esther went before King Xerxes, her husband, knowing she could perish if he did not hold out the golden sceptre towards her, but as Christians, the golden sceptre is **always** held out to us

and we can go into our heavenly King and Father's presence with boldness and confidence. Not only are we to have confidence in approaching God, but we have:

B. Confidence of Our Prayers Being Heard and Answered.

As God's child our prayers are always heard and answered. We say God answers our prayers as "Yes", "No" or "Wait". Yet the word of God says more in Ephesians 3:20 for He "*is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us*". God has bigger things than to answer our prayers in accordance with our little expectations - He is the God of surprises!

Here in v22 we have one of these surprises - "*receive anything we ask*". This is a verse that people like to take out of context and they go for health, wealth and prosperity. That is the vending machine approach to prayer - press the right buttons by asking and out drops the answer we want! This great and awesome God of heaven does not answer our every whim and wish in prayer like some celestial genie! If He did, which one of us would dare to pray! We, like children, do not always know what to ask for our best or good. If God answered every prayer as we wanted, we would soon be spoilt brats, self-centred and arrogant. We are not to just to focus on this part of v22, but note the condition of such prayer being answered - "*because...*" These are not causes of our prayers being answered, but conditions for them to be answered.

Here we are back in the 1st test - obedience, living a righteous life and keep His commands to do what pleases Him. It does

not mean we must have perfect obedience, else none of us would be able to ever pray in confidence, but it focuses on our desires to live obediently and as far as we can, we live to please Him. It is not exclusively about our actions, as it is so much linked with our desires, yet those desires worked out in actions as we are able to.

We are to obey God and seek to please Him. For some of us, we may or may not be greatly handicapped by our backgrounds, by the baggage of our past life. Sadly, sometimes true believers carry old ways, habits, thought patterns that still affect them and these may take a long work of grace to remove and they may even go to their graves suffering the effects of a harsh life of sin. Others converted were moral sinners and so they live apparently more respectable lives and are not handicapped, in a public way at least, by sin's effects. We are not to mistake true grace for manners, culture, learning, nice living and well speaking. Saving grace is just as real in a saved pagan as in an Oxford don.

We are nevertheless to live our lives in obedience to God and not use our backgrounds as an excuse. Obedience and pleasing God are not optional, but essential and they are one continually ongoing process - a present continuous tense for both actions. Our supreme example is the Lord Jesus - He pleased God, obeyed Him and was heard in prayer. His innermost will was conformed to His Father's and He only asked what the Father wanted and did what pleased His Father. Our keeping His commands and doing what pleases Him show that our wills are conformed to his. We are able to

pray as John says in 1 John 5:14 *“This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.”* When we pray in Jesus’ name, it is not just adding the phrase that says *“we ask this in Jesus’ name”* at the end of our prayer and that sorts out all we’ve said. Not at all, that is trying to use Jesus’ name as a magic charm or incantation. We pray in Jesus’ name when we pray in accord and in line with His character, purposes and revealed will. This means we ask for what is pleasing to Him and we want it for God’s glory and we must pray with clean hearts, quiet hearts, hearts that know they are forgiven and have forgiven others; hearts that believe God’s promises i.e. all that pleases Him and we desire to keep His commands.

We do not keep God’s commands to increase our credit and chances in prayer, but because we love God, we want to please Him; so we keep His commands and even our prayers are to please Him and not for selfish, self-satisfying and gratifying ends. Knowing God’s word, we are better able to pray in accord with His will and God knows such prayers can be safely answered for they are in tune with what pleases Him and for His glory.

To make things easier for us, John reduces these commands down to one command in **v23** and the word for command is singular, but this command has 2 equally balanced and essential ingredients - faith in His Son Jesus Christ and loving one another, just as He, Jesus, has commanded. I suppose this is a summary of this letter and two central and unchanging truths are here. God has revealed Himself in many ways, but the clearest and final revelation of Himself is in His incarnate

Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, His person and work. That is what is meant by “*the name of His Son, Jesus Christ*” - it includes all Jesus is, all He has done and so we are to read the divinely inspired apostolic writings, the gospels and their writings to learn of Him. We are commanded by God to believe in His name i.e. in Him and all He has done. This is essential. Without such we would be trying to get to heaven in a way that God has said no to. The tense of the verb here (*aorist*) means a definite action at a specific point of time - saving belief in, not merely about, but in Him for our salvation. Have we done this? Do we know it to be so?

Yet the God who is love, calls us to know His love and that love is to flow through us also - a practical, self-sacrificing love, for the good of others and to prevent their harm. Here the command is to continually to keep on loving one another. John is driving home the reality of the 3 tests and that they are all are related to each other and necessary - keep God’s commandments, believe in Christ and love the brethren. He doesn’t give us any escape hatches does he!? John also challenges us as to our prayer life.

As believers in Christ, are we living to please Him in obedience and loving one another. This is to give us confidence in prayer as we go before Him and I pray we would be those who know the joy of our prayers being answered as we ask in accordance with His will, to please and glorify Him and so have the delights of His presence more and more.