

Know This

1 John 5:13-21

This morning we'll be finishing out the letter of 1st John. Pastor Dave got us through the first half of chapter 5 last week, and we'll finish the chapter starting in verse 13. This portion of scripture features a few difficult verses that we'll attempt to make sense of, so get ready with me to wrestle with *understanding* this morning, so that we can properly know the things that God is wanting us to know from this passage. **Verse 13** is where we'll begin, it gives us the reminder of the motivation behind why John wrote this letter...

John wants us to be confident, knowing that we have eternal life, not living in fear of what the future holds, not living in fear of sickness and death- but really grasping and holding onto the truth of who we are as citizens of Heaven under the leadership of King Jesus. So as God's word commands us back in 1 John chapter 1 to walk in the light- the contextual purpose behind that is so that we can be assured of having eternal life. Chapter 2 tells us to keep the commands of Jesus, to love Him and not the world, to remain in Him as we're aware that the Anti-Christ is coming and that His spirit is already here- why? So that we can listen and follow these instructions and thus be assured of having eternal life. Chapter 3- we are told to purify ourselves, to not be phased by those in the world who hate us, but rather to love one another in deed and truth- why? So that we can remain in confident hope of the eternal life Jesus has offered us. Chapter 5- we love God and follow His commandments- why? Because this is what those who have been born of God do, and the ones who have been born of God overcome the world and inherit eternal life. So that is the focus and encouragement that John (and God) is wanting for the reader here- to know that you have eternal life. And then in verse 14, John mentions another thing in addition to eternal life, in which we are to know and have confidence. **Verses 14-15...**

Now, this is a passage that we have to be really careful with, and really strive to understand what is being said here. When we ask (pray) for anything, if that "anything" is according to God's will, then God hears us and God will give us what we have requested from Him. So obviously knowing what "God's will" is should help us in knowing what things we can be sure of praying for and receiving. We are scripturally given an idea of the types of spiritual blessings God

wills to give us if we only ask Him- for example: spiritual wisdom and understanding, forgiveness of sins, His favor, adoption into His family, justification before Him, help with holiness in this life, grace, peace, eternal life. These things are scripturally what God wills for us, and we are guaranteed by God to receive these things as we ask Him with humility, repentance, and reverence. Now, in contrast, concerning asking God for *temporary, worldly* blessings- though God's desire is blessing for His people, we are not always very good judges of what will actually end up being a blessing for us. The expression "according to His will" could probably also be stated as "what He sees best for us." It's very easy for us as humans to assume receiving a certain answer to prayer is the best course of action for our lives or the lives we're praying for, when in reality, only God knows what good things and even bad things that happen will end up having the best result of blessing for us.

So we acknowledge before God our limited understanding, we admit before Him that we don't always know what is best for us, and we attempt to, as Jesus said, to "*Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness,*" and then trust that all the other things that we need, according to His will, will be provided for us. **(Matt. 6:33)** **Psalm 84:11** says "*For the Lord God is a sun and shield; The Lord gives grace and glory; He withholds no good thing from those who walk with integrity.*" Here's the deal- when we pray, we don't have to feel like, "God, I don't know if you want to do this thing or not, maybe you do, maybe you don't, but I really want this thing to happen, and I don't know if it's in your will or not, but if it is please do it..." I think the idea is more like, if we're living lives that are seeking first His kingdom, if we are living lives walking with integrity as that Psalm says, then we can boldly say "God I'm praying for this thing because it seems like it would be a good thing that you would will, but I trust that you know what's best and I can be fully confident that you're going to do the best thing in this situation and I don't have to worry about it because you love me." In other words, apart from what God's word already says is God's will, aside from that, we don't have to try to determine what God wills or doesn't will, rather we can just boldly pray knowing that if we are living in right relationship with Him, then we can trust Him to do the thing that will ultimately have the very best results for us and for the others we are praying for. We never have to question whether He wants the best for us or not. We don't have to question whether He loves us or not. We pray, and say as Jesus said, "not my will but yours"- and then we can be

fully confident that His will, which is to give us as His children the best possible blessing, will be accomplished.

And though we may not immediately “see” that the prayer is answered, we can be confident that God hears us, and again, He will answer our prayers in the way that best promotes our good. Sometimes the answer that best promotes our good is by God *not* giving us the thing we are asking for, or God making us wait longer for the thing we are asking for. Paul prayed repetitively for God to take away something and God replied that His “*Grace is sufficient,*” that “*His power is perfected in weakness.*” (2 Corinthians 12:8-9) In other words, there was something really good and powerful that God wanted Paul to not miss, that Paul would have missed had God answered that prayer in the way Paul was praying. There was going to be an amazing, powerful blessing that would only be realized through God *not* intervening, an amazing experience of reward and God’s goodness through grace that Paul could *only* receive through a little more temporary suffering and weakness.

Perhaps there’s some here even right now, who resonate with Paul’s experience. Maybe you’ve been praying for something, and that something hasn’t happened. Of course the first thing to do would be to examine your life and make sure you’re doing your best to “seek first the kingdom of God,” and walk “with integrity.” If the answer is no, you realize you haven’t been seeking first the kingdom of God, and you haven’t been walking with integrity- if God brings to your mind something that’s not quite right, something that might be embarrassing if others knew about it, something that you’ve been ignoring doing that you should be doing, or something you’re doing while ignoring God’s conviction- then you have to make that right *first* before you can have any confidence in how to pray. You need to repent before God and repent before any others you’ve wronged before you can have any confidence in knowing what prayers God should be answering or not answering. But maybe there’s some here today that you’ve been praying for something and you know in your heart that you have been seeking first the kingdom of God, you have been walking with integrity, there’s not some hidden unconfessed sin in your life- you’re not perfect, but your heart is right before the Lord, and you’ve humbly been asking God for something and it hasn’t happened- then the confidence you need to remain in is that God has not answered that prayer yet because there is a better outcome that He wants for you and He is going to see that better outcome through- even if it hurts

temporarily, because He loves you and wants you to experience the absolute best outcome.

When I was in middle school, I broke my wrist launching off a skateboard ramp. I had flown off of it more than 20 times with perfect landings, but for some reason that last time my weight got shifted really weirdly, and I fell back hard on my right wrist. It was such an impact, that my hand was literally fully separated from my wrist. Now, there was enough pain to make me not want anyone to touch it- right, just leave me alone, give me some medicine and let me heal. But that would *not* have resulted in the best outcome for me- my bones would have healed really strangely, and I would have had problems with my wrist for the rest of my life. Rather, the best thing for me, unfortunately, involved some more pain. The doctor would need to reset my wrist where it needed to be, and then drill a hole through my bones so that a metal pin could be hammered through, temporarily holding the bones together so that they could heal correctly. That pin would also later need to be pulled out, and trust me, that wasn't a fun experience either. But that temporary pain ended up saving me a whole life of pain and hardship due to a messed up hand and wrist. The doctor had to let me experience some really difficult things in order for the best outcome to be realized in my life.

We all have to trust that God, if we've surrendered our lives over to Him, we have to trust that He is going to be faithful to carry us through and bring us to the very best outcome that we could have ever imagined, even if it involves some temporary disappointment and suffering in this world. I'm going to be very raw and real with you right now- personally I feel like I've been in a recent season of seeing God miraculously answer prayers prayed for *others*, while He seems to be been ignoring some of the prayers I've prayed for me and my family. It's crazy, it's been almost comical. "Yep, God, there you did it again, that was pretty cool what you did for *that* person. Must be nice... Got any of that for me too?" Does anyone else sometimes feel like that- like all the prayers around you are getting answered except the prayers for you? That's exactly how the enemy wants us to feel. That God has forgotten about us, abandoned us, or that God wants to withhold good things from us- and it's simply not true. God loves me and He *is* answering my prayers- for others *and* for me and my family, and He is bringing all things together for the best possible outcome because my life is

surrendered to Him and He has claimed me as His own dearly loved child. And you can have the same confidence too if your life is surrendered to Him.

Now in the next two verses, there's a bit of a disclaimer mentioned concerning prayer and praying for what God wills. Check it out with me, **verses 16-17...**

John knows it would be easy for someone to read verses 13-15, and come to the conclusion that if we pray for someone who we'd consider a brother or sister (a fellow Christian) who is sinning, in other words, they are living like they are actually NOT a follower of Jesus, it would be easy to come to the conclusion that if we pray about it, then God *must* fix it- it would be easy to think that we can be confident that God *must* restore and wake that person up because that would be what God wills. Right- **2 Peter 3:9** says God is *"not willing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance."* It's clearly stated that that is what God wills, so therefore we would think we could be confident that He will answer that prayer- but John says not necessarily- there's a disclaimer. John says yes, God will answer the prayer offered for another believer who is wrestling with sin, except if it's "sin leading to death." So what does that mean- what is sin leading to death, and what is meant exactly by death- is that physical death or spiritual death? Many have debated the meaning of this passage for centuries, there are lots of opinions out there. Some have taken it to mean a sin that is a really big sin- something like murder or rape, others think perhaps John is referring to the sins stated in the Old Testament that specifically call for a punishment of death. Some see it as maybe a sin that would cause the Lord to react by bringing about a fatal disease on the person as punishment, and there are several other views in addition to these as well. Personally I think it's worth noting what Jesus said in Matthew 12:31-32, also referenced in **Mark 3:28-29**, Jesus says *"Truly I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons and daughters of men, and whatever blasphemies they commit; 29 but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin."*

Blasphemy is the concept of someone saying that something wrong is right, and that something right is wrong. So when applied to the Holy Spirit, it seems the understanding is that all sins can be forgiven, except the sin of arguing against God's Spirit. Like, when God's Spirit is nudging a person that it's wrong to do something, and someone responds in their mind "No, it's right to do that."

Or God's Spirit is working on someone saying "do this, it's the right thing to do," and instead of doing that right thing, the person responds by intentionally doing the wrong thing. Jesus says that's a sin that can't be forgiven. And we're not given details on how long or how many times someone's heart can resist and blaspheme God's Spirit before it equates to rejecting God's plan through Jesus, and God says "that's enough, there's no more forgiveness opportunities." We do know God is gracious and merciful. I think there's an example of God's mercy given in the story of Moses and Pharaoh, when Moses kept going back to Pharaoh each time saying "Let my people go," and each time Pharaoh had an opportunity to soften and humble his heart in repentance, and that opportunity was given many times, but Pharaoh instead continued to harden his heart, and eventually he sealed his own fate. So perhaps this is the type of idea John is referencing here in this passage, basically saying there's a point in which someone is committing the one sin that can't be forgiven, the sin leading to eternal death (blasphemy against God's Spirit), and that is a prayer that you should not necessarily expect God to answer.

You see, the whole story of the Bible, is basically the premise of an Almighty, All-powerful, All-knowing Supreme Creator God interacting with creatures He has given free-will to. That's the whole basic plot of the entire Bible. There's this dynamic, push-pull, moving relationship between a being who can do anything He wants at any time, yet who willingly chooses to limit Himself in some ways in order to interact with and give the "gift of choice" to weak, puny, stubborn human beings. The very beginning of the whole story of the Bible is set up very clearly in these exact terms. Almighty God creates everything that exists, and everything is great, but the first thing He does is set up a choice for mankind to choose between good and evil, a choice between God's way *or* mankind's prideful, selfish way. And we read that mankind gave into the prideful, selfish choice. And the All-powerful God didn't stop mankind from exercising that choice of selfishness that Adam and Eve made in the Garden of Eden. He *could* have stopped them- I'm sure that's not what God wanted Adam and Eve to do, and it hurt Him to see them make that choice, and He knew that choice would result in all kinds of bad things happening- but the whole plot of the Bible is based on this one dynamic- that Almighty God has chosen *not* to override humankind's choice of accepting God's ways or their own ways.

This premise continues throughout the Old Testament and into the Gospels and New Testament- the Gospel message is basically choose to humble yourself and repent, accept God's way of forgiveness and thus have eternal life in Heaven; *or* harden yourself against that message, continue living selfishly according to your own natural tendencies, and thus separate yourself eternally from God. The Gospel message of Jesus is basically that Jesus died for and forgives every single sin, except the one sin of rejecting this plan of God- blaspheming against God's Spirit.

So perhaps this is what John is thinking of as he is writing. John perhaps is reminding us that, while a prayer for another person is noble, unselfish, and loving, and while God is willing that none should perish but all have eternal life, the fact of the matter is still that the prayer of one human being can never override another person's freewill. You can't pray for God to cancel out another person's free-will- that is against His character and against the spiritual laws that He has enacted from the beginning of time. Now **if** this is what John is referring to, there's still possibly a little rub in this interpretation because it might be pretty difficult for us as humans to determine and judge if another person is committing blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, and thus know whether or not to pray for another who is wrestling with sin, or know whether or not to have confidence that God will snap them out of it and save them or not. In that sense, it might seem a little odd to interpret this passage in the manner I've laid out, but the other interpretations also have some short comings as well, perhaps even more significant short comings. Let me know after the service if you feel like God has given you insight into this passage. Either way, if you see another brother or sister in Christ struggling in sin, perhaps even to the point in which it appears they may be abandoning their faith and rejecting Jesus- pray for them, and humbly encourage them to get things right and live for Jesus. Verse 18 to the end... **(v 18-21)**

Verse 18 is another verse that is a little tricky. John says those born of God, (those living for Jesus)- do not sin, because *the* one born of God (Jesus) keeps him from the evil one (Satan). This verse seems to be in complete contradiction to what John said at the beginning of his letter, **chapter 1 verse 8**: *"If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us."* So one verse says we sin, and the other says we as believers born of God do not sin. This is a tension that much of the New Testament wrestles with. On one post is

hung the concept that the human race is sinful and in need of forgiveness, and that after receiving forgiveness- in learning more about Jesus and walking with Him- the supernatural progression is that we are freed from sin and should be giving in to wrongdoing less and less as we mature, yet we are still capable of making mistakes; and on the other post is hung the concept that Jesus has forgiven past, present, and future sins of those who receive Him, and that He sees them spotless and righteous in regards to their spiritual condition- and in terms of spiritual, eternal life and death- there is no longer any sin produced in their lives. And I think John, and God, are ok with us living in this tension strung between these two posts. Verse 19 again...

Especially as we near the day in which Jesus returns for His church, the divide between those who are of God, and those who are of the world controlled by the evil one- that divide will become greater as we near the day of Christ's return. It says the whole world lies in the power- the control- of the evil one. The whole world, with exception to those who are of God- the whole world- all the governments, all the political leaders, all the militaries, all the businesses, all the organizations- apart from those who are of God- are under the control of evil.

But those who know they are *of God*- they are defined in verse 20 as those who know that the Son of God has come. People who know that Jesus the Messiah, God's son, has come to Earth and know Him to be the only means of salvation and blessing- these are those who are *of God*- God's people. John, of Jewish descent, one who could say- "Hey my DNA is connected to Abraham," *he* defines God's people solely as those who know Jesus. Jesus has given John and the others who have also surrendered to Jesus understanding, so that they know the truth- that Jesus is true; and God keeps His people, (again- defined by those who know Jesus) God keeps them *in* Jesus, so that they are protected from the rest of the world that is under the power of Satan. Note that there's only 2 categories here in this passage. There's Jesus followers who are God's people, and there is the rest of the world who is under the power of Satan. Jesus people = God's people. Everyone else who rejects Jesus = not God's people. And then John ends verse 20 by saying that this true Jesus in which we are kept and protected, He (Jesus) is the true God, and He (Jesus) is eternal life.

The last verse, verse 21, seems a bit abrupt, a little jarring, disconnected. But perhaps that's quite intentional. Perhaps it's meant to serve as wake up call,

a striking note to leave the reader on. But at the same time, it *is* very connected, especially to the previous 2 verses, verses 19 and 20. Verses 19 and 20 tell us that we who follow Jesus are the ones who are of God, who are in the true God-Jesus; and that the whole rest of the world in it's entirety is of the evil one. Therefore- be on guard against idols- idols defined as anything and everything that is of the world, that is of the evil one, that is not of the true God, Jesus. You can't be protected in Jesus- you can't be in Jesus while at the same time holding on to some idols. So guard yourself. Don't let anything compromise your protection in Jesus. Don't let any other spiritual or religious creeds distract you, don't let earthly attainments like money, power, health, success become your focus, don't let political opinions and movements deter you, don't let temporary pleasure and happiness be your pursuit- no, guard yourself from these idols- Jesus is the only true God worthy of worship and Jesus is the eternal life. Period. Remember: Any attempt to unite mankind in religion, or in earthly kingdoms- apart from Jesus Christ- will be at it's roots a demonic, anti-Christ movement. Outside of Jesus, everything else is under the power of the evil one. So guard against that, don't let any idols take the place of Jesus, remain in Him- the true God, the true eternal life.

In closing, I want to draw your attention to how many times John tells us to "know" something in the closing of his letter, in addition to knowing we have eternal life. There's so much in life that we don't know and understand. In a world of confusion, I want to equip you with this encouragement from God's word, contained in the letter of 1st John. Here's the direct "know" statements from today's passage: Know that you have eternal life. Know that He hears you. Know that we have the requests we have asked (according to His will). Know that no one who has been born of God sins. Know that we are of God. Know that the Son of God has come. Know Him who is true.