

THAT YOU MAY
KNOW

A STUDY OF FIRST JOHN

“Assurance and
the Success
of Prayer”

1 John 5:13–17

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“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life. This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us *in* whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.

If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not *leading* to death, he shall ask and *God* will for him give life to those who commit sin not *leading* to death. There is a sin *leading* to death; I do not say that he should make request for this. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not *leading* to death.”

(v. 13)

(vv. 14–15)

(vv. 16–17)



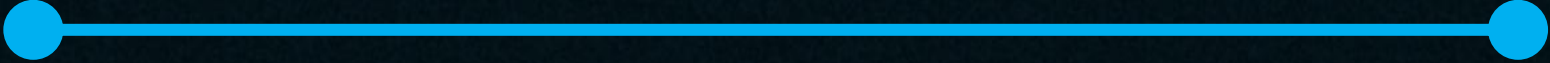
I. The Argument for Prayer

1 John 5:13

"You have eternal life."

“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life” (5:13).

- **“These things”** – refers to all that John has written in the letter.



1 John 1:4 –
“These things
we write . . .”

1 John 5:13 –
“These things
I have written . . .”

- **“To you who believe”** – John’s audience; those who expressed *genuine faith* (knowledge → conviction → confidence); *sola fide* (“faith alone”).
- **“The name of the Son of God”** – the object of this faith; an acceptance of the apostolic testimony as to the true identity and work of Jesus (see John 20:31); the common refrain of the letter; Jesus is the One who *saves*.

“These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, **so that you may know that you have eternal life**” (5:13).

- “**So that you may know**” – the summary purpose of John’s entire letter; a knowledge that has come to be *known* and results in *conviction*.
- “**That you have eternal life**” – the *content* of what is known:
 - Not merely a life that *doesn’t end* (quantity/breadth), but a life of *prosperity/blessedness of the soul* (quality/depth).
 - Not merely a reference to the future, but a reality in the present.
- The standard for assessing one’s assurance of salvation is not *experience*, but *what has been written*.

THE PURPOSE OF JOHN'S GOSPEL → to present the gospel

“Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.”

—John 20:30–31

THE PURPOSE OF FIRST JOHN → to provide assurance

“These things I have written 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



“It is common today to decry any claim to assurance of salvation, to dismiss it as presumptuous, and to affirm that no certainty is possible on this side of death. But certainty and humility do not exclude one another. If God’s revealed purpose is not only that we should hear, believe, and live, but also that we should know, presumptuousness lies in doubting His word, not in trusting it.”

—John Stott, *Epistles of John*, 185

PRINCIPLE #1:

The assurance of eternal life is the argument for a vibrant, confident prayer life.

“Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.”

—1 John 3:21–22



II. The Assurance for Prayer

1 John 5:14–15

"He hears us."

“This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us” (5:14).

- **“This”** – points forward to the second half of the sentence.
- **“The confidence”** – the final of four occurrences in the letter (previously 2:28; 3:21–22; 4:17); “a state of boldness, especially in the presence of persons of high rank”; especially emphasizes confidence *to speak*.
- **“Before Him”** – the *reference* of this boldness; implies *before God’s face*.
- **“If we ask”** – the beginning of a condition that is assumed to be true; emphasizes a request that is offered from need, particularly for *oneself* (see especially, 1:9 and 2:1).

“This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask **anything according to His will, He hears us**” (5:14).

- “**Anything**” – emphatic in the sentence; highlights the *limitless nature* of prayer requests, even with reference to one’s own need.
- “**According to His will**” – the *crucial standard* for the fulfillment of this condition; not a *blank check* for selfish, sinful desires.
- “[**Then**] **He hears us**” – the amazing promise we possess when the standard is met; not a mere listening, but a *giving heed to*.
- **1 John 3:21–22** – “Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.”

- **Matthew 6:9–10** – “Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.’”
- **Mark 14:36** – “And He was saying, ‘Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will.’”
- **John 14:13–14** – “Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do *it*.”
- **John 15:17** – “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”

- **John 16:23–24** – “In that day you will not question Me about anything. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full.”
- **James 1:5–6** – “But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting. . . .”
- **James 4:2–3** – “. . . You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.”

“Prayer is not a device for imposing our will upon God, but rather the bending of our will to His in the desire that his good will may be done.”

—D. Edmond Hiebert, *Epistles of John*, 256



“Prayer, according to God’s will, is an activity growing out of the consciousness of the sweet relationship of a child and a father. Such an intimacy involves harmoniousness of will and only asks for what accords with that will.”

—George Williams

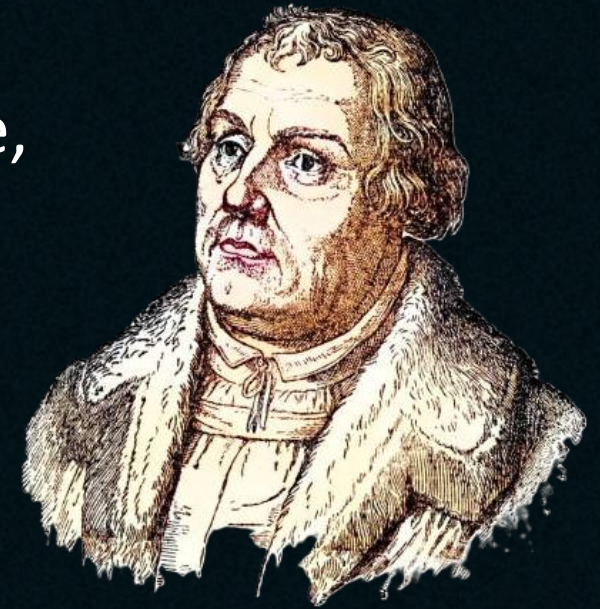
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“And if we know that He hears us *in whatever we ask*, **we know** **that we have the requests** which we have asked from Him” (5:15).

- **“And if we know”** – the beginning of another condition that is assumed to be true (“and if we know, *and we do, . . .*”), drawn from the conclusion just reached at the end of v. 14.
- **“[Then] we know”** – a settled, confident knowledge that God *heeds our requests* leads automatically to further confident knowledge.
- **“That we have the requests”** – the believer’s confidence culminates in knowing that *God answers our prayers, when we align our praying with His revealed will.*

“Prayer is not overcoming God’s reluctance,
but laying hold of His willingness.”

—Martin Luther



“God will either give you what you ask,
or something far better.”

—Robert Murray M'Cheyne

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PRINCIPLE #2:

Prayer is the special means that God uses to give His children what they want, when their desires are rightly aligned.

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!”

—Matthew 7:7–11

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III. The Application for Prayer

1 John 5:16–17

*“If anyone sees his brother
committing a sin ...”*

“If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not *leading* to death, he shall ask and *God* will for him give life to those who commit sin not *leading* to death” (5:16a).

- John now provides a particular application of intercessory prayer.
- **“In anyone sees”** – another conditional clause, this one expressed as a hypothetical situation (same in 2:1b); the verb “sees” implies something observable and objective, not something suspected or assumed.
- **“His brother committing a sin”** – that which is “seen” is a “brother” (a member of the believing community) commit sin (literally, “sinning a sin”).
- **“A sin not *leading* to death”** – *literally*, “a sin not with reference to death,” and death is *separation*; i.e., sin that is not connected with spiritual separation.

“If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not *leading* to death, he shall ask and *God will for him give life* to those who commit sin not *leading* to death” (5:16a).

- **“He shall ask”** – the same verb used in v. 14 to describe *asking for oneself*; here, used for *asking for another*.
 - “When a sibling in the family of God stumbles, the first response is to be intercession for the person in prayer in the presence of the divine head of the household” (Yarbrough, *1–3 John*, 307).
 - What we do *for ourselves*—1 John 1:9—is what we do for others.
- **“*God will give him life*”** – a reference to the ongoing benefits secured by the propitiation of Christ for all believers (1 John 1:9; 2:1–2).

“Surely it is an iron hardness not to feel pity when we see souls, redeemed by Christ’s blood, going to ruin.”

—John Calvin



“There is a sin *leading to death*; I do not say that he should make request for this” (5:16b).

- “A *sin leading to death*” – two general categories of interpretation:
 - If it is assumed that a believer commits it, then “death” is *physical* (e.g., Ananias & Sapphira, Acts 5:1–11; stark disobedience, 1 Cor 5:3–5; abusers of the Lord’s Supper, 1 Cor 11:27–30).
 - If it is assumed that an unbeliever commits it, then “death” is *spiritual/eternal* in nature.
- There is good reason to connect this sin to the *secessionists*, who explicitly rejected truth and became “antichrists” (1 John 2:18, 19, 22; 4:3).
- “I do not say . . .” – not a strict prohibition against it, but a release from obligation to it; don’t pray for that which stands against God’s will.

“All unrighteousness is sin” and there is *a sin not leading to death*”
(5:17).

- **“All unrighteousness is sin”** – despite John’s two-fold categorization of sin in v. 16, he still insists that all that “violates the standard of right conduct” is sin; all sin is *serious* (see 1:5).
- **“A sin not *leading to death*”** – nonetheless, John wants his readers to understand that as serious as sin is, genuine believers can commit sin and this does not mean they are apostate.

PRINCIPLE #3:

Since prayer is the special means that God uses to give His children what they want, they should especially pray for the restoration of fellow Christians who have stumbled.

“Prayer is beyond any question the highest activity of the human soul. Man is at his greatest and highest when upon his knees he comes face to face with God.”

—Martyn Lloyd-Jones

“What is the best means of cheerfulness in such a world as this? How shall we get through this valley of tears with least pain? I know of no better means than the regular, habitual practice of taking everything to God in prayer.”

—J. C. Ryle

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“Prayer is the most direct expression of faith, because prayerfully turning our thoughts and will to God is the initial step from thought about God to full assurance of God. But the same token prayer is the most direct expression of love. It is an offering of highest priority, since the first thing we owe God is our thinking and willing.”

—A. Schlatter



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