

## **Divine Gifts for Those Who Believe 1 John 5:13-17**

### **Introduction**

We are nearing the end of 1 John. Next week J. D. Crowley will teach the final verses. Today we begin with one of the most often quoted verses in the letter because of how helpful it is to introducing the people the concept that they can know for sure they have eternal life.

**13** I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life. **14** And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. **15** And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him. **16** If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that. **17** All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death.

The apostle John makes clear that he wrote his gospel for the sake of those who had yet to believe in Jesus.

John 20:30-31

**30** Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; **31** but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

The apostle John writes his epistle of 1 John, on the other hand, to those who are already believing in Jesus:

1 John 5:13

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.

That you may know . . . .

Theme for the letter

Doctrinal and practical tests through which we can have

Confidence in gospel truth

Discernment regarding false teachers

Assurance regarding our own status

Our text this morning reminds us how John began this letter—"we are writing you that (y)our joy may be complete."

It is difficult if not impossible to be joyful in Christ if you are confused and unsure of His gospel or of your personal standing with Him.

So here toward the end of his letter John returns to why he wrote his readers, his readers being those are believing into the revealed character of the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

To all who are connected to Jesus Christ through faith in Him, God gives priceless gifts of grace:

1. Assurance of Life (13)
2. Confidence in Prayer (14-15)
3. Intercession for Others (16-17)

### **1. Assurance of Life (13)**

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.

John has just made the point that if you have the Son of God, you have life. If you don't have Him, you don't have life. Christ and life are inseparable. This is the testimony of God Himself.

Sometimes people struggle whether or not they really have eternal life. Where they need to focus is whether they are trusting in Jesus Christ as the Scriptures reveal Him to be—His name, His revealed character. His deity—the Son of God.

Others argue that it is presumptuous to think you have eternal life. That would be true if God had not made clear how we can know. It is not based on our performance. It is based on His performance. On the reliability of His promises.

No one has earned eternal life or ever will. It is a free gift to all who are believing in Jesus.

You have eternal life

*Eternal life is the current possession of a believer. It is not just a future gift we get after we die. We already have it now. It is a present certainty and a present experience, even though the full benefit of it is yet to come.*

Eternal life is divine life given to us. As such it lasts forever—quantity or duration. But eternal life from God also has divine quality to it—godly quality. His life in us is transforming us even now. That’s why a person with eternal life starts becoming more and more like Jesus. His or her life takes on the character of love for God and love for others that manifests itself in practical ways. God’s life in us bears fruit. The fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

The Holy Spirit indwells every true believer in Jesus, giving us life. His life in us changes us at the level of mind, heart, and desire, and flows out through our words and actions. These are the good works that God has given us life to display.

Ephesians 2:10

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

*Good works don't produce life in us. Life in us produces good works. And that life is ours through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Only through Him.*

Humility and certainty go together. Humility that we have life because of the goodness of Jesus, not our own. And certainty because of the promise and power of God.

Have you turned from our self-trust and self-rule to trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son? Are you counting God to be completely trustworthy when He promises you eternal life through His Son? Then you can know you have eternal life.

This living relationship with God leads to the second great gift of God for those who believe.

## **2. Confidence in Prayer (14-15)**

**14** And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. **15** And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.

Confidence—often translated boldness; used of bold witness of the apostles filled with the Holy Spirit—freedom of speech.

Confidence toward Him

Talking about our approach to God. Why should He listen to us at all? What mortal sinner could be so bold?

Hebrews 4:14-16

**14** Since then 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 is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. **16** Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

This confidence is further defined: that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.

Prayer is not telling God what to do—bending His will to our command. No sane believer

want God to answer a prayer request that would somehow disrupt or thwart His perfect plan for us, our loved ones, and the whole redemption story.

“Heavy lies the head that wears the crown.”  
(Shakespeare, Henry IV)

Anyone who exercises any kind of leadership knows the truth of that statement. We feel it as parents, as teachers, as pastors, as managers, employers. The more leadership responsibility you have, the heavier the load and the higher the stakes. Who is his right mind would want to rule the universe? Only God is wise enough and strong enough and loving enough to do it right.

But this text says the believer can pray with confident boldness, freedom of speech. How is that possible? What if I pray the wrong thing? No worries. “If we ask according to His will He hears us.” He hears our heart behind our words. He knows exactly what we would pray for if we had His perfect view of all things. He knows we would not want Him to do anything that would be the wrong thing in some way. He hears us. He listens. And the verse 15 indicates that He gives us what we request.

1 John 5:15

And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.

How can this work? How can my finite prayer tap into infinite power and wisdom without my messing things up?

Strikingly, Paul teaches that the Holy Spirit empowers our praying to make it effective. Romans 8:26

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.

God gives to every believer the amazing privilege of speaking freely with Him in prayer. He listens. He answers. He channels His power through our prayers. But *prayer operates by His power, and it must operate according to His will. That's exactly what we need to be able to pray boldly. Else we would be terrified of making a mess of it all because of our limited perspective.*

God gives us what we ask for. But He decides the time and the way. If I don't have a positive answer to my requests yet, it may be that my request was out of alignment with His will in some way or the best timing for the answer is yet to come about. *You trust Jesus who is interceding for you. You can trust the*



*Spirit who is interpreting for you. You can trust the Father who loves you and does all things well to do what you ask in the perfect way and at the perfect time. Don't stop talking to God. Be confident. It is given to you through Jesus in whom you have put your faith.*

You can talk freely with those you trust and with those you know love you. That's God. Come boldly to Him. Speak freely with Him. That's what close friends and family do. Pray boldly, knowing He will channel your requests into perfect harmony with His will.

"More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of." Tennyson, *Idylls of the King*

### **3. Intercession for Others (16-17)**

<sup>16</sup> If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that. <sup>17</sup> All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death.

Now John zeros in on what is perhaps the most significant kind of praying we do. Prayer for God to give life to sinners we know. Just as God uses our proclamation of the gospel to bring life to those who hear and believe, so

He uses our praying to give life to sinners, as well. The power is His, the privilege is ours.

Usually the term *brother* refers to a fellow Christian, but here it appears to be a broader reference to our family, neighbors, friends, and acquaintances with whom we have some kind of relationship—possibly a nominal Christian in the congregation of believers.

This verse does not seem to be referring to a Christian because it talks about God's giving the individual life. If he's a believer, he already has life—verse 13. Eternal life.

Another possible explanation that preserves the idea that a brother is a Christian is that God's giving this brother life is God's preserving a fellow believer's life—that is keeping him in the faith so that he does not fall away.

The point to remember is that it is God who gives us life and rescues us from sin and death, whether we have yet to believe or have done so already. The NT knows nothing of a genuine faith that does not continue and that does not eventuate in life change.

Believers are literally "believing ones." They keep on believing. Repentance and faith are present not just at conversion. They continue throughout the Christian life. Conversion is

just the turning point. We need to be praying for one another, as well as for our friends who have yet to believe, that God will give others life and keep them healthy in a world that tries to seduce us into turning aside and pursuing sin instead.

You may recall a similar admonition from Jude:

Jude 1:20-23

<sup>20</sup> But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, <sup>21</sup> keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. <sup>22</sup> And have mercy on those who doubt; <sup>23</sup> save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.

In context, the death here in 1 John 5 speaks of spiritual death. Condemnation to eternal punishment.

What is this sin that leads to death? What John has already taught in the letter helps us understand what he means here. He has taught us that deliberately refusing to believe, refusing to obey God's commands, and refusing to love your brothers and sisters lead to eternal death. Without repentance

from these sins, life is impossible. We remain in darkness and death.

1 John 3:14

We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.

1 John 5:16b-17

**16b** There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that. **17** All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death.

John taught us in chapter one that no one is without sin, and everyone sins, but that believers confess their sins to receive forgiveness and cleansing.

But from this text it is clear that there are levels of sin. Sins from which we can repent from and be restored, and a sin that is so highhanded that turning back is nearly impossible but for extraordinary divine intervention.

Hebrews 6 and Hebrews 10 talk about persons who have fallen away and cannot be restored to repentance. They have heard the gospel and have benefited from association with the community of faith, enjoying the blessings God pours out on His people. Yet now they repudiate the gospel. They boldly

defy God's claims and have joined the rebellion led by Satan. Jesus Himself talks about the unforgivable sin of deliberately attributing to Satan what one knows to be the work of the Holy Spirit of God.

Given the warnings in this book about false teachers, antichrists, and liars, John seems to have particularly in view those false teachers who are denying Jesus is the Christ or that Jesus is the Son of God in the flesh sent by the Father. False teachers that are justifying sinful living as if it does not matter. False teachers that base their confidence in their higher knowledge while showing disdain and lack of love for believers. They have defected from the faith and are teaching others to do likewise. John has made clear that these enemies of the gospel are not just apostates—those that have fallen away. They are counterfeits and antichrists that were never truly part of the community of believers. Children of the devil not of God. Rejecting the Son, they don't have the Father.

*This "sin that leads to death" is therefore not a sin you can unknowingly commit. It is deliberate, willful opposition to Christ and His gospel.*

John does not encourage praying for such a person, but he does not forbid it either. There

is historical evidence that on occasion God does rescue such persons.

From a human standpoint, we do not know for sure when they have crossed the line of no return. Whether they are just drifting or self-deceived or willfully defiant. But John is clueing us in to the tragic reality that such persons may never turn back and for that not to discourage us from interceding for others.

For whom do you pray regularly?  
Who do you know is at risk, drifting, or turning away? Our children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, friends, neighbors in a world of lies and deception.  
Pray that God will give them life!

### **Conclusion**

If you have Jesus, you have everything you need—priceless gifts from God to all who believe.

1. Assurance of Life (13)
2. Confidence in Prayer (14-15)
3. Intercession for Others (16-17)

What a Savior!  
What power!  
What privilege!  
What joy!

## Discussion Questions

1. John says that he writes what he does to those “who believe in the name of the Son of God.” What would be some reasons those who already believe in Christ need apostolic instruction regarding doctrinal and practical tests of gospel integrity?
2. Why isn’t it presumptuous for a believer to be certain he or she has eternal life?
3. What are some ways we believers show and enjoy having eternal life in the present not just in the future?
4. What (Who) gives us the privilege of being bold, confident, and free in our bringing prayer requests to God?
5. How does knowing God answers us according to His will give us greater confidence to pray boldly and freely?
6. We should worry about nothing but pray about everything (Philippians 4:6), but what significance do you draw from John’s primary focus on intercessory prayer for a brother committing sin?
7. Given what John has already taught us about false teachers, antichrists, and liars, why did John give the reality check that he’s not saying to pray for those who have committed sin leading to eternal death?
8. Why does he not forbid praying for such people?

9. Who are some persons for whom you are interceding—or should be?