CONFIDENCE IN APPROACHING GOD

1 John 5:13-17

Key Verse: 5:14-15

“This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.”

Thank God for Jesus Christ who came by water and blood and the Spirit that testify him. The clear testimony of God is that God has given us eternal life and this life is in the Son. He who has the Son has life and he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. Then in 5:13, John recorded, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.” Here, John wrote the purpose of writing this epistle. This could be the end of 1 John. However, John had to write more out of his shepherd heart for his spiritual children. So 5:13-21, 9 verses are the postscript or epilogue of this epistle as its summary or conclusion. In this epistle, the expression “we know” or “you know” is written 39 times, and in this postscript, 7 times. We are living in the time of uncertainties. “We know” or “you know” means certainties. Christians are those who have certainties in life (Lk. 1:4: Heb 11:1), transcending time and space in Christ (Eph. 2:6). In this postscript, John described 5 Christian certainties: eternal life, prayer, divine protection, our identity as children of God and the world under the control of the evil one, and understating through the Holy Spirit. In today’s passage, 5:13-17, we will think of two certainties: the certainty of eternal life and the certainty of God hearing our prayers.

**First, assurance of eternal life (13).** Again 5:13 says, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.” In the Old Testament, it is written in Daniel 12:2, “Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.” Basically “eternal life” is the New Testament term written 43 times, particularly 17 times in John’s gospel. The representative one is in John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” In 1 John, it is written 6 times: in verse 1:2, “…we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us”; in 2:25, “And this is what he promised us—even eternal life”; in 3:15, “Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murder has eternal life in him”; in 5:11, “And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in the Son”; here in 5:13, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life” and; in 5:20, “…And we are in him who is true—even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.”

What is eternal life? Eternal life is first of all to live forever with God in his eternal glorious kingdom. And the eternal life begins here and now. Jesus said in his high priestly prayer in John 17:3, “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, who you have sent.” It is knowing the true God and Jesus Christ, and further having fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ as described in 1:3. We can say that eternal life is the best quality of life, a life that lacks nothing, wants nothing, seeks nothing, misses nothing, desires nothing other than what it has, and enduring forever. It is the very life all people truly want. For God has set eternity in the hearts of men as written in Ecclesiastes 3:11. In the synoptic gospels, a rich young ruler came to Jesus and asked, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Mt 19:16; Mk 10:17; Lk 18:18). It can be the very question that arise in the hearts of all human beings made in the image of God, the eternal God.

John 20:31, the ending verse of John’s gospel except the epilogue, says, “…these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” John’s purpose of writing this gospel was that the recipients may believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and as a result have eternal life. In other words, people may believe and be saved. The gospel of John has a message of salvation. In Acts 13 Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel to the Jews, but they rejected it. Then Paul and Barnabas said, “We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles.” We believe that those who consider themselves worthy of eternal life are those who regard eternal life the most precious, more precious than anything in the world.

Again, here in 5:13, John described the purpose of writing this epistle, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.” John wrote this epistle so that the believers may know and have assurance that they have eternal life. The epistle of John has a message of assurance. The gospel of John was to bring people to belief, and the epistle of John is to eliminate any lingering doubt from those who believe in the name of the Son of God. Believing in the name of the Son of God can mean being true to who He is and what He has done.

Here John reminds us of what he has written in this epistle. Jesus Christ is from the beginning. When he came into this world, those who was around him experience him, hearing him, looking at him and touching him. He is our advocate with the Father for our defence as well as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. The antichrist is the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ. When Jesus Christ appears, we shall be like him. Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. The Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world. This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. And the Spirit testifies to him. This is God’s testimony: God has give us eternal life, and this life in his Son. In writing this epistle, John wants those who believe in the name of the Son of God to know that they have eternal life.

What can be greater assurance than that of eternal life! In this world, people have life insurance. We know that life insurance does not fully insure our own life. Rather, insurance is some financial assurance for the remaining family members after someone’s death. The assurance of eternal life is truly great in this world. Those who have this assurance live a different life in this world. They do not love the world, for nothing is envious to them. They can overcome the world, anything in the world, even physical death, and the world is not worthy of them. They live for the sake of Christ and his kingdom, in the hope of this kingdom’s coming. They love God and love one another. This kind of life can be the life worthy of eternal life assured to us through our faith in the Son of God.

**Second, confidence in prayer (14-15).** As the purpose of this epistle is specified in verse 13, this could be the end of this epistle of 1 John. Yet, John had to write 8 verses more. John could not really end this epistle without these. Particularly the first two verses among 8 verses are “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.” With the assurance of eternal life we are pilgrims in this world, heading toward the eternal kingdom of God in heaven, more specifically the New Jerusalem. Yet, in this world we have needs, problems, struggles, concerns, issues to deal with. God did not leave us here to cope with such matters all by ourselves. He provided us with a certain way for all such things. It is through prayer. Prayer is approaching God coming into his presence. We shall see the Lord Jesus Christ when he comes again, and we shall see God in the new Jerusalem., entering the eternal presence of God. We await the entrance into its fullness. Yet, God opened for us the way to come into his presence through prayer. We have access to all of God’s resources through the means of prayer. Prayer is essential to every pilgrim whose face is set upon glory and eternity, and without it we cannot live. Here John tells us once more that nothing is more important than our prayer life and that therefore we should be certain in our minds and in our hearts to this great biblical teaching with regard to prayer. Prayer is God’s way of doing things. As He has decided to order and maintain the creation through various laws that He has put into nature, so he has decided to work in the spiritual realm through prayer.

John already talked about prayer in 3:21, “Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.” However, here John had to write more about prayer. What then do these verses teach us about prayer?

Firstly, God wants us to ask anything according to his will. James 4:2 says, “…You do not have, because you do not ask God.” Jesus said in Matthew 7:7-9 in the Sermon on the Mount, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks find; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.” Jesus continued in 7:9-11, “Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will give your Father in heaven give you good gifts to those who ask him!” And Jesus said in John 14:13, “I will do whatever you ask in my name” in 15:7, “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you” and in 16:23-24, “In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anting in my name. Ask, and you will receive, and you joy will be complete.” Paul said in Philippians 4:6, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” How much does God our Father in heaven want us to ask him? We do not ask, because of our pride or human dependency. Yet, we know that human dependency has a great limitation. Despite ourselves, God wants us to come to him and ask him whatever situation we are in and whatever problems we have. There is a hymn song, which goes, “I must tell Jesus all of my trials; I cannot bear these burdens alone. In my distress He kindly will help me; He ever loves and cares His own …I must tell Jesus! Jesus can help me, Jesus alone.” We believe that asking includes pouring out our hearts, even bitterness, on him.

And our asking is to be according to the will of God. Those who believe in the name of the Son of God have the Lord’s prayer in their hearts, “…hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done…” (Mt 6:9-10). 1 John 2:17 says, “The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.” Certainly, God’s will is God’s kingdom, which will be accomplished in this world as Christ Jesus comes again and will be forever. And he does not want anyone to perish, but everyone come to repentance. Also, he wants each of his children to be strong and courageous and be an overcomer in this world. He does not want his people to be fatalistic in any human situation, truly living by faith and for his name’s sake. He wants us to be refined in faith through all human problems, obtaining faith, which is of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire. He wants us to follow his leading in each step of life, seeking his way in all matters. With such will of God in our hearts, we can ask him anything.

When we pray asking anything and everything, we should know that he hears us. His ears are sensitive to the cry of his children. Time or place are not a problem. When we pray in any place and at anytime, he hears us. As parents are attentive to their children’s cry, much more so our Father in heaven is to his children. Apostle Peter wrote in 1 Peter 4:12, “For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer.” His ears are truly attentive to the prayers offered in Christ Jesus, our righteousness. When we think of God who hears us, our prayer topic should be very clear. When a blind man came to Jesus overcoming all the obstacles, Jesus asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The man replied, “Lord, I want to see” (Lk 18:41). Jesus was very much pleased with the blind man’s request and gave him his sight. Jesus did not think that his prayer topic was not spiritual. The man’s immediate reply, “Lord, I want to see” showed that he had such an earnest desire to open his eyes as his crystal-clear prayer topic, while many other blind men lived just as they were. Our Toronto chapter’s clear prayer topics are Spirit-filled worship service through living messages each Sunday and that we become true and faithful witnesses of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit, based on Acts 1:8.

Then in verse 15 it says, “And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.” This is the assurance of God answering our prayer. God’s hearing means his answering our prayers. It means God has power to carry out what he hears. In this world, there may be some people who can hear us. But what if they have no power to do it? Human hearing is one thing and doing what he hears is another. But as for God, hearing means executing. So John encourages us to believe that we have what we asked of him. It is a truly wonderful thing that our asking and God’s hearing and our having are one set. In light of this we can ask anything according to God’s will. With the assurance of our having we can pray unceasingly and persistently.

And Jesus said, “Have faith in God. If anyone says to this mountain, “Go, throw yourself into the sea” and believe that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore whatever you ask in prayer, believe that we have received it and it will be yours.” (Mk 11:22-24). In prayer, we should really fight against doubt. James says in 1:6-7, “But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.” It is really a shocking rebuke to those who doubt in praying. Why do people doubt? Doubt is also related to one’s indecisiveness without urgency or being desperate, having the second way of surviving, with the attitude, “I am still okay, though I do not have this from God.” Or long duration of prayer can make us doubt. Ye, it is a great biblical teaching that when we pray, God hears us and so we have what we asked of him. Our having is assured, but when we will have, the timing, is up to God. We should deeply recognize this. He surely answers our prayers. But he answers at his time and in his way. We believe that his time is the best, so is his way. God is faithful, truthful and powerful.

Also, we are to know that God even changes his mind to bless an individual or a nation. King Hezekiah was one of the great kings in Israel, loving God and serving his people wholeheartedly. But he became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah went to him and delivered God’s message that he would die. It was the situation that Hezekiah had to accept this destiny of his life in this world, since it was God’s message to him through the prophet. However, Hezekiah could not accept it as the final. He turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, “Remember, O LORD, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly. Then (before Isaiah had left the middle court,) the word of the LORD came to Isaiah: ‘Go and tell Hezekiah, ‘This is what the LORD says…: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears. I will add fifteen years to your life...” (2 Kings 20:1-6; Isaiah 38:1-4). We know that God is sovereign and absolute and his word is inflexible. Yet, God can be flexible not to ignore but to answer our prayers somehow. Of course, God will not and cannot change his grand course of the management for the whole world. But in the compass of allowable range, he can change his plan according to our prayers. This is how much God wants us, his children, to come to him and pray, believing that he hears us and we have what we ask of him.

Another example is this: God decided to destroy the great city of Nineveh in forty days. The Ninevites believed God and feared God’s judgment message. The king, all the people, and even the animals fasted. The king said, “Let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.” When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened (Jonah 3). The Ninevites were not even God’s people, but when they prayed to God fasting, God changed his plan hearing their prayer. Then how much more when his children pray like that! After teaching his disciples the Lord’s prayer, Jesus told them a story about a man, who goes to his friend at midnight to get some bread to serve a guest, while the man had nothing. Then the friend inside answers, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything.’ Jesus continues, “I tell you, though he will not get up and give them the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man’s boldness/persistence he will get up and give him as much as he needs” (Lk 11:8). In God, there is no inflexible or fixed situation for those who pray. God really wants his children to pray, asking anything, knowing that he hears and they have what they asked of him.

**Third, prayer for a brother (16-17).** Now John says, “If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life.” What a prayer! What a restoration of life! God is pleased to restore my fellow in Christ through my prayer as I pray with brotherly love. In other words, we should pray urgently and earnestly until my brother is restored. As a Christian I should be in a right relationship with God and also in a right relationship with my brother. Apostle Paul also said in Galatians 6:1, “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should retore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.”

Then John wrote furthers in 16 and 17, “I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that. All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death.” In 1 Corinthians 11:30, those who participated in the communion eating and drinking without recognizing the body of the Lord became weak and sick, and a number of them even died. God’s judgment here was physical death. Yet, here concerns spiritual death through sin that leads to death. Jesus also said in Luke 12:10, “Everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.” The background event of this was that in Chapter 11, Jesus drove out a mute and deaf demon from a man, certainly by the power of the Holy Spirit. But the Pharisees denied the obvious fact and said, that by Beelzebub the prince of demons, Jesus was driving out demons. The sin against the Holy Spirit can be what John means by ‘a sin unto death.’ Clearly this is something that cannot exist in unbelievers generally. Unbelievers are not wilful, they are not deliberate—they are just blind and ignorant. The people who sin against the Holy Spirit are people like the Pharisees, people like those described in Hebrews 6, who had been in the church and had experienced, in general, certainty of the operation of the Holy Spirit and then had turned against the gospel. Jesus came by water and blood and the Spirit. But they deny this witness and evidence of the Holy Spirit with regard to Jesus Christ. ‘The sin unto death’ is that which crucifies Christ afresh, saying that He is not the Savour and His blood shed upon the cross is not the only way. As for us, we should always watch out for our self-righteous and stubborn unrepentant heart at each moment. With this watching, we may pray and see the restoration of a brother in Christ.

Thank God for the assurance of eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Thank God that God our Father in heaven wants us to ask anything according to his will and assures us that he hears us and we have what we asked of him. With the assurance of eternal life and of prayer may we live as praying people in this world and be moulded as men and women of prayer in our time.