

## 1 John 5:14-15

**1 John 5:14-15** says,

**<sup>1Jn 5:14</sup> Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. <sup>15</sup> And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.**

I want to make what should be a fairly obvious deduction based on the overall context of **1 John**. This is just an opinion on my part, but it does not appear that John is digressing into a detailed teaching on the meaning of prayer and how it works, so we do not want to do that. The entire subject matter of **1 John** would not lead us to believe that John is giving some kind of detailed exposition on prayer and how it operates. Obviously, he is talking about prayer, but as he draws this letter to a conclusion it seems that in these remaining eight verses that he is simply extracting some obvious conclusions from what he has written, and one of those conclusions has to do with God answering the prayers of those who truly know Him. In the overriding context of John's letter, answered prayer is something that only a true believer can actually experience.

Prayer has always had a kind of mystery that surrounds it. It has elements about it that are not always easy to explain or even to discern. God's ways are not our ways, and obviously He is not inclined to always answer a believer's prayer in the exact way that their prayer was requested. It is not that He is trying to be mysterious or difficult - not at all, but His ways simply are not our ways and that often times creates a kind of spiritual tension within the believer. As God works and operates in our lives, there are many aspects of those outworkings that are not always clear to us. If He determines to bring certain things to pass in ways that are contrary to how we would have accomplished something, then why should we even question His outworking? Obviously, how He achieves the outcome will always be better and greater than anything that we may have devised. What we do know with some level of certainty, however, is that God does work in the spiritual realm through prayer.<sup>1</sup>

Now, in this letter John is identifying some of the primary biblical characteristics of genuine Christians. So what he is saying in these verses is that true believers are individuals whose prayer life confirms the authenticity of their salvation. Look in **1 John 5:14-15** and notice how many times John uses the simple word "we". He uses that word seven different times and then if you include the word "us" which he uses twice, it should be clear that he is talking about a particular characteristic of those who are genuinely saved. They are confident when they pray. Without reading too much into this passage or spiritualizing it, it is probably safe to say that those who are not saved cannot have any confidence if and when they may find it convenient to pray. In reality, that is a spiritual impossibility. So someone has to ask the simple question "*Do I have any confidence whatsoever that God will answer my prayer when I petition Him?*" That is a very telling and revealing question for someone to answer.

Now, before we proceed with the exposition of v14-15, it is important to appreciate that within the context of **1 John** that it should be obvious that John is not addressing these particular two verses to those Christians who are living disobediently and outside of the boundaries of God's Word or God's will. This entire letter has contrasted those individuals whose life reflects obedience to the will of God with those individuals whose life does not reflect obedience to the will of God. These kinds of verses which are scattered throughout the New Testament are not some kind of blanket promise that anyone

can claim. That should be obvious to anyone who is a discerning Christian. The kind of believers that this level of promise is made to (based on the rest of [1 John](#)) are those who are walking in the light, who are being cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ, who are more than willing to confess their sins, who are keeping God's commandments, who love other believers, who have overcome the wicked one, who are strong because the Word of God abides in them, who do not love the world or the things in the world, who are abiding in Christ, who are not habitually practicing sin in their life, but are habitually practicing righteousness in their life. That is the context and the individuals to whom a promise like this actually applies and we cannot derive God's truth from this passage if we do not understand those truths that John has clearly elaborated for five chapters.

In fact, John has already addressed this particular issue in [1 John 3:21-23](#) when he said,

**1Jn 3:21 Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. <sup>22</sup> And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. <sup>23</sup> And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment.**

The operative word in v22 is the word “**because**”. It is a word that creates the foundation for something else to happen. It establishes the conditions for answered prayer. Believers receive from God because they keep His commandments and do that which is pleasing to Him. So, it would be quite inappropriate for someone to read these verses and to anticipate or expect that it is a blanket promise for God to simply give us whatever we may want. That perspective and that mindset is completely unbiblical. There are some promises made to believers that are unconditional in their nature. In other words, the promise does not depend on the believer, but rather on the character of God as One who is true to His word. Then there are conditional promises that are dependent on the believer, and specifically dependent on their obedience and behavior. This is a conditional promise, so in order for the promise to be fulfilled for the believer, the conditions for that promise must be met. So the first thing that we have to do is to define the conditions, and it will be important to utilize both passages in [1 John](#) that pertain to this promise.

**Condition 1:** We must have a high level of “**confidence**” in God ([1John 3:21, 1 John 5:14](#))

The word for “**confidence**” in both verses refers to the actual act of speaking. It is a freedom or an assurance in speaking.<sup>2</sup> This “**confidence**” that John is addressing is something that has been developed in a believer's heart over an extended period of time. It means that they have consistently been yielding their life to the work of the Holy Spirit within them. They fully understand that prayer and God's corresponding answers to prayer are not some kind of blank check so that they can have whatever they may desire. Meaningful prayer is a deeply spiritual undertaking in a person's life that ultimately has as its object the glory of God. Jesus exemplified this attitude in His life because every prayer that He prayed was simply a reflection of His desire to do the will of His Father. Prayer is not cheap, but rather it is demanding and time-consuming. It is not something that someone can have great confidence in if they are not involved in it at a highly personal level. Then, to add to what creates confidence, the individual must know that they are both accepted and loved by God Himself. If someone has doubts about whether or not they themselves are saved, then any effort at prayer will become somewhat futile. How can someone pray with confidence if they do not even think that God has saved them or that maybe they have lost their salvation? I doubt very seriously that if someone thinks that God is not even willing

to save them that they will think that He actually listens to their prayers. This is exactly why [1 John 5:13](#) addressed the issue that we can know that we have eternal life and that we may continue to believe in the name of the son of God. Everything John has written has been to convince a genuine believer that they are truly saved. Knowing that simple fact is what undergirds someone when they pray. If I am not sure about my relationship to Christ, then surely I will not be confident when I pray.

There are many people, for instance, who only pray during times of personal need. As long as things in their life are going along fairly smoothly, then they have no motivation or incentive to pray. They are the individuals who really do not have any kind of meaningful prayer in their life, so they only pray when they feel somewhat desperate about something. The person who really has assurance and confidence relative to prayer is someone who is quite consistent in praying. They have come to know God, they have come to trust God, and they are basing their life and their decisions on God's Word. So, they pray simply because they have great faith in God and in His Word. To them prayer is something that is very normal and very necessary. They have seen God work many times in their life and they have seen Him answer their prayers that they prayed according to His will. If you were to look at their life, it would reflect Christ. In other words, they are Christ-like in their attitudes and their behavior. [1 John 2:28](#) uses the same word “**confidence**” when it says,

**1Jn 2:28 And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.**

The last thing that we want to happen is to stand before God and “**be ashamed**” because we did not live a life that was pleasing to Him and did not live a life that honored Christ. As John states in this verse, in order to actually “**have confidence**”, the believer must “**abide in Him**”. We must maintain in an abiding relationship with Christ. In fact, the word “**abide**” in this verse is a present tense verb simply meaning that the believer is “**to abide and to keep on abiding**”. In other words, this is the normal testimony of their life and it is something that is very visible and very evident in their life. We must abide in Christ and His words must abide in us. [John 15:7](#) says,

**Jn 15:7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.**

The idea of abiding is that of remaining, of staying, and of continuing to be obedient to the will of God. It is the idea of remaining faithful during difficult times and during those moments in our life when things seem to be more than we can handle. It is a perspective on our life where we come to a place where we find ourselves completely dependent on God for every area of our life. In a Christian culture that is so affluent, this idea of being dependent on God seems to have become culturally lost. Our tendency is to trust in ourselves and in our ideas and in our programs, but too often they are the very things that actually keep us from abiding in Christ. We have no right to think that God will answer our prayers when we do not have a sense of dependence on Him. For someone who is living in open sin and who is consistently disobedient to what they know to be the will of God, God's heart is not open to their prayers.

**Condition 2:** We must “**keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight**” ([1 John 3:22](#))

The words for “**keep**” and “**do**” are in the present tense. In other words, the believer whose prayers are answered are those individuals who have been keeping the word of God and the commandments of God for an extended period of time. The problem that many people have is that they think that they can live outside of God’s ordained boundaries for their life, and then have some kind of emotional change of heart for a short period of time and that that change of heart obligates God to answer their prayer. Nothing could be any further from the truth than that misconception. The words “**keep**” and “**do**” will not allow for that interpretation in this passage. They are words that speak of a lifestyle that has been prominent, conspicuous, and foremost in the individual’s life for a long time. None of that is to say that God will not answer someone’s prayer, but it certainly qualifies those individuals for whom God is prone to answer their prayer. It is not someone who is sporadic and apathetic in their obedience to his Word. These two words mandate a long-term obedience towards God. There is no escaping this spiritual condition. Being obedient to the Word of God must be the continual habit of the believer’s life if God is going to truly answer their prayers.

Most of the time, God does not answer prayer in accordance with our personal timetables. To the contrary, it seems as if He is never in a hurry when it comes to answered prayer. The person who is not saved has absolutely no patience when it comes to unanswered prayer. Often times they begin to question God, to question His character and integrity, and to actually blame Him and assault His person as being unloving or unfair. If you have loved ones who are lost and you have been praying for their salvation for a long time, then you can certainly understand how this often works in a believer’s life and how God does not seem to be on our timetable. One of the obvious characteristics of a genuine believer is that they are not frustrated when God does not answer their prayers in accordance with what they thought was best of their life. Why are they not frustrated? The answer is because they know God in a deep and personal way and they know that He knows much better what they need than they do. The true believer is someone who has come to that place in their life where they trust in the sovereignty of God, in the wisdom of God, and in the goodness of God. You will not find a true genuine believer all the time questioning the outworking of God’s will in their life. They have learned to rest in Christ and in His salvation.

**Condition 3:** We must “**ask...according to His will**” ([1 John 5:14](#)).

Now, it should be obvious that there are many things in our lives relative to the will of God that are not specifically addressed in the Word of God. There are things like where we should live, what kind of occupations we should have, who we should marry, what name we should give our children, or what church we should attend. However, this verse is specifically addressing those things that God identifies to be His will. The only place that we can truly find the will of God for our life is in His Word. Certainly that is not to say that God does not or will not use other people or various circumstances in our life to help direct us into His perfect will. He does use those kind of things in our life and they can be very helpful to us in understanding what God may want for our life. One obvious example would be the godly influence that parents should have on their children in providing godly direction for their lives. More mature Christians should be mentoring younger Christians in their walk with Christ. However, relative to answered prayer it should be obvious that God is not going to answer someone’s prayer if that request is out of alignment with His will as revealed in His Word. So, if we can make this practical, the less time that a person spends in the Word of God, the less they will be able to know or to discern the will of

God for their life. The tragedy that many people experience is that they wander through their entire life completely divorced from the will of God. They live according to their personal desires, their personal preferences, and their personal ideas - none of which may ever lead them into the will of God. In fact, most times they are the very things that lead them away from the will of God for their life.

Please notice the last phrase in [1 John 5:14](#) – “**He hears us**”. Now, just because God is God, it should be obvious that there is nothing that is hidden from His hearing. He not only hears everything that is spoken, but He also hears everything that is not spoken. He knows what a man or woman is thinking, so when John uses the word “**hears**”, it has a deeper meaning than just physically hearing what someone says. What the use of this particular word means is that God is open to our prayers. It means that His heart is open to those things that are important and vital to our life. He hears, He understands, and He is more than sympathetic to His children’s requests - and especially those that are according to His will.<sup>3</sup>

Now, I do not want to sound arrogant in any of this, but whenever we as Christians come to the throne of God in prayer, it seems that we should always do so with great confidence in the God that we love. He is our Father. He is the One who has saved us and brought us into His kingdom, and because we know Him personally and have His truth etched into our hearts and minds, it almost seems demeaning that we would come to Him without confidence. My encouragement to you is to fall on the grace of God and become totally dependent on Him in every area of your life. Just simply yield yourselves into His will and into His amazing grace and when you do, you can have confidence that He surely hears your prayers and will answer them in a way that will benefit you the greatest.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Lloyd-Jones, 661.

<sup>2</sup> Zodhiates, 1124.

<sup>3</sup> Lloyd-Jones, 662

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