

I JOHN: A STUDY IN SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT

XVI. Discerning True, Effective Prayer

(1 John 5:14-15 et al.)

I. Introduction

- A. 1 John was written to counter heretical views (B. K. C., N. T., p. 881), so the epistle provides discernment.
- B. A great misunderstanding among Christians today are ideas on what one needs to do to get answers to prayer, be it using a certain vocabulary, a certain posture, fasting before praying, getting many people to pray, etc.
- C. 1 John 5:14-15 and other Scripture passages clarify the truth on the matter, what we view for our application:

II. Discerning True, Effective Prayer, 1 John 5:14-15 et al.

- A. In addition to 1 John 5:14-15, Scripture provides information on both effective and ineffective prayer.
- B. Accordingly, we first view what Scripture teaches are ineffective ways to pray to God (as follows):
 - 1. If the person praying harbors sin in his heart, God will not hear him, Psalm 66:18:
 - a. The psalm's author was a believer (v. 16), so if a believer harbors sin in his life, God will not hear him.
 - b. As for unbelievers, they already stand condemned before God (John 3:18), so He does not hear their prayer. If an unbeliever prays to receive Christ, God saves him for trusting in Christ, nor for praying!
 - 2. If a person uses repetitive phrases or special phrasing to get God into grant him his request, God will not respond to that effort, for God already knows what he needs, Matthew 6:7-8.
 - 3. If one prays to impress others, God refuses to hear him, for prayer must be made in humility, Matt. 6:5-6.
 - 4. Though one may fast in addition to praying, what the Hebrews in Scripture did, no Biblical directive calls believers in Christ to have to fast. Matthew 17:21, Mark 9:29 and 1 Corinthians 7:5 in the King James Version seem to command fasting, but the directives to fast in each of these passages was later added to the original manuscripts by scribes in the interest of unbiblical ascetics. (Bruce M. Metzger, A Text. Com. on the Grk. N. T., 1971, p. 43, 101, 554)
- C. Proper prayer that God hears has the following characteristics:
 - 1. The one who prays must be righteous before God:
 - a. He must be positionally righteous, having put his faith in Jesus Christ for salvation, John 14:12-14.
 - b. He must be experientially righteous, not harboring sin in his life (Psalm 66:18; 1 John 3:22) in having his sins that were committed when he was a believer confessed up to God for cleansing (1 John 1:9).
 - 2. The one who prays must conform his petition to the revealed will of God, 1 John 5:14-15:
 - a. John clarified in 1 John 5:14-15 that we can be confident that if we make a petition to God in prayer that aligns with His will, He hears that prayer, and if we know that He hears it, He gives us what we ask.
 - b. To know what is the will of God, we discern it through Scripture revelation:
 - i. All Scripture is divinely inspired, constituting the authoritative words of God, 2 Timothy 3:16.
 - ii. Accordingly, the sixty-six books of Scripture provides abundant information on what constitutes God's will, so we believers can discern God's will through reading Scripture!
- D. In addition, Scripture provides us guidelines on the proper format of prayer:
 - 1. Some believers direct their prayer to "Jesus" or even to the "Holy Spirit," but in teaching His disciples to pray, Jesus led them to address their prayers to God the Father, cf. Matthew 6:9.
 - 2. Since Jesus taught His disciples to pray to the Father in Jesus' name (John 14:12-14), we should do so.
 - 3. Jude 20 also directs us to pray in the power of God the Holy Spirit, what occurs when one relies on the indwelling Holy Spirit of God to live the Christian life, cf. Galatians 5:16-23.
 - 4. If a person has ignorantly prayed in misalignment with this format, Romans 8:26 claims that the Holy Spirit intercedes for him, for none of us really knows how to pray as he ought. However, if we know the correct format, God expects us to use it as He expects more from us who have been taught. (Luke 12:48b)

Lesson: Effective prayer is NOT made by one who is an unbeliever or by a believer who harbors sin in his life, it is NOT made with repetitive or special phrasing, it is NOT done in prideful showmanship, and it does NOT HAVE to be done with fasting. Rather, effective prayer is made by believers in Christ who are experientially righteous, and whose prayers humbly align with God's Scripturally revealed will. The proper format in prayer is to direct our prayers to God the Father in the Name of Jesus Christ, doing so in the power of the Holy Spirit, trusting that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us as we really do not know how to pray as we ought.

Application: May we pray in accord with Scripture's teaching on prayer for an effective prayer life with the Lord.