

1 JOHN – CHAPTER 5:14-21

Confidence and the Sin unto Death

INTRODUCTION

As we conclude our journey through 1 John 5, this final section (verses 14-21) serves as a capstone to the epistle's themes of confidence and contrast. Building on the crescendo of verses 9-13, where the author emphasized knowing eternal life through God's testimony, these verses escalate to practical implications: bold confidence in approaching God, intercession for brothers, and three resounding "we know" statements affirming the believer's security, understanding, and separation from evil. The letter ends abruptly yet pointedly with a warning against idols, reinforcing the need to guard against anything that challenges the true doctrines of God.

In previous lessons, we examined the testimony of God (water, blood, Spirit) as the foundation for assurance (5:6-9), the internalization of that testimony leading to assurance of eternal life (5:9-13), the victory of Jesus over the world and believers being overcomers (5:4-5), and the interconnectedness of belief, love, and adherence to Jesus' commands (5:1-5). Now, the author shifts to application, showing how assurance manifests in connection and discernment.

As we read and study this section, we must always remember that it still reflects the themes and message of the letter and read the author's conclusion in the context of his letter.

1 JOHN 5:14-15 – CONFIDENCE BEFORE GOD

This section begins with "This is the *confidence* which we have before Him," using the noun "**παρρησία** *parrēsia*" (boldness or confidence), which echoes 2:28, 3:21, and 4:17, linking assurance to abiding in Christ.

In 2:28 and 4:17, the confidence is about when we see Jesus at His coming in the day of judgment. But in 3:21, the context is about the "children's" confidence before God in dealing with the antichrists, following the prescription of the apostolic doctrine, and observing the love.

Now we come to verses 14-15, and we must evaluate what this is talking about.

The phrase "before Him" indicates being in His presence, rooted in our position as children born of God (5:1). The conditional clause, "if we ask anything according to His will," indicates requests aligned with God's "**θέλημα** *thelēma*" (will or desire).

This is not according to our desire but God's, revealed through Scripture. The verb "**ἀκούω** *akouō*" (hears) indicates hearing with attentive acknowledgment and response (John 9:31, 11:41).

Verse 15 continues with "And if we know," where "**ἐάν** *ean*" with the perfect active indicative "**οἶδα** *oida*" (we know). Here, the "**ἐάν** *ean*" means "when" or "whenever." The author is doing his layered repetition with the use of rhetorical devices. This is an affirmation, not a condition. This is understood clearly in the use of "**οἶδα** *oida*."

1 JOHN – CHAPTER 5:14-21

Confidence and the Sin unto Death

The phrase, "we have the requests," indicates current possession of what was asked, based on alignment with God's will. In the context of verse 13 and the main issue of the letter, here is my conclusion of what is being requested and granted. The author is encouraging them to seek the knowledge and truth of Jesus' promises.

In this context, the message is confidence and knowledge of the children who are in Christ and their confidence in addressing the false teachers.

How do we know this? In verses 13-20, we have six uses of the verb "*oida*"

1. We know we have eternal life
2. We know that he hears us
3. We know that we have our requests
4. We know that the one having been born of God sins not
5. We know that we are of God
6. We know that the Son of God has come

This is not about general requests from God, but about what is next.

1 JOHN 5:16 – THE SIN UNTO DEATH

This passage is a point of controversy. God, in many ways, has physically disciplined believers even to the point of physical death (1 Corinthians 11:29-30). We need to note that this is a recompense to believers at the behest of an apostle (Acts 5 – Ananias and Saphira). 1 John 5:16 seems to state that there is a sin that leads to physical death.

The context, however, has no indication of sin in the moral sense. The sin in this book is denying that Jesus is the Christ and not loving the brethren. 1 John 3:14 – We know that we have passed out of death into life; we know we love the brethren. He who does not love (articular participle) abides in death.

In this context, it appears the author is addressing how to respond when an individual encounters a doctrinal error. If someone observes a fellow believer experiencing an error that does not pertain to serious matters, the recommendation is to pray for them, with the expectation that they will be restored as they come to accept correct doctrine. However, if the individual is committing a grave sin or promoting teachings or behaviors associated with the antichrist, the author advises against praying for them.

The author may be discussing moral failure, distinguishing between those that lead to death and those that don't, and suggesting different responses for each. However, this text leaves these categories undefined and is unique, making it unclear when to pray for someone. Given this ambiguity and lack of support elsewhere in Scripture, we should be cautious about forming doctrine from this passage.

1 JOHN – CHAPTER 5:14-21

Confidence and the Sin unto Death

1 JOHN 5:18-20 – THE THREE "WE KNOW" AFFIRMATIONS

Verse 18: "We know that no one who is born of God sins," repeating 3:9. This is an articular participle and denotes positional identity.

The verb "sins" is negated (**οὐχ**, *ouch*), meaning "does not sin"—contextually, does not deny Christ. But he who was born of God keeps him is another articular participle, indicating a possession, and the evil one does not have any control or sway over the believer.

Verse 19: "We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one," contrasts with the world's subjection to the devil, reiterating 1 John 2:15-17.

Verse 20: This is a reiteration and an affirmation reinforcing security, separation from evil, and true knowledge, culminating the epistle's assurances. This reiterates 1 John 3:1-6.

1 JOHN 5:21 – GUARD AGAINST IDOLS

This warning seems to be oddly placed and abrupt. But after further consideration, keeping the entire letter as a whole (2:18-23), I am convinced that idols here not only represent false gods but also doctrines rivaling Christ, tying back to warnings against antichrists.

CONCLUSION

In 1 John 5:14-21, the author synthesizes the entire letter into confidence, assurance, and knowledge of who they are in Christ and two stern warnings about falling for the false message of the antichrists.