

Christians Have Confidence Toward God In Prayer.

Text: 1 John 3:19-24

Suggested Hymns:

423, 325, 420, 291, 426

1) Because There Is No Condemnation To Those Who Are In Christ Jesus

2) Because By The Holy Spirit They Dwell In God And God In Them

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 1 John 3:19-24, ¹⁹ *And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.* ²⁰ *For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.*

²¹ *Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.* ²² *And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.* ²³ *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.*

²⁴ *Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Today is Prayer Sunday. It invites us to study what Holy Scripture has to say on prayer. *Rogate* is the name of this Sunday, which means, "Pray!" The very name emphasises the plain command of God to pray.

This command is often stated in Scripture. It is the essence of the Second Commandment, which tells us to use the name of the Lord, our God properly by calling upon Him in every trouble, praying, praising, and giving thanks. There are many other passages of Scripture where this precept of the Lord is repeated.¹

Added to this Commandment in Scripture is the definite promise of God that He will hear and answer every prayer of His children. In our text the Apostle says, *whatever we ask we receive from Him.* As a matter of course, so easily the

Apostle lets these words flow from his pen, so assuredly he speaks because there can be no question about it.

And he has authority to do so. He had learned this truth from his Master, the Teacher come from God. Often Jesus had spoken to His disciples about prayer. *“Ask, and it will be given to you,”* He had said.²

In the Gospel for today we hear Jesus saying to His disciples, *Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you.*²⁴ *“Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.”*³ And again Jesus said in the same farewell addresses,¹³ *“And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”*¹⁴ *“If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.”*⁴

This is the summary statement of our text *“whatever we ask we receive from Him”* — to make it stand out boldly — the Apostle now puts into a beautiful frame, teaching, before and after, why Christians should be confident in prayer.

Let us reaffirm the statement that *Christians Have Confidence Toward God in Prayer.* May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Christians Have Confidence Toward God In Prayer

Because There Is No Condemnation To Those Who Are In Christ Jesus

Our right and privilege to pray is not based on our own merit. If that was the case, we could have no confidence whatsoever toward God in prayer.

Scripture is clear *“For there is no difference;”*²³ *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*²⁵ Sin, even the least of it, excludes us from God. It shuts access to God. We read in Isaiah 59:2,² *But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear.*

Therefore the Apostle in our text mentions the possibility, *“if our heart condemns us.”* Being sinners, our heart, or conscience, cannot but condemn us. Our heart, as it is by nature, cannot but cause fear and trembling at the thought of God, just as fallen Adam and Eve, were very afraid, terror-stricken, and fled as they heard the voice of the Lord God in the garden of Eden.

Yes, far from having confidence toward God, our heart would drive us to despair, just as it drove Judas to despair and hurled him into everlasting condemnation.

Hence, people who still rely on their own merit, including the self-righteous — for *“all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags”*⁶ — cannot have confidence toward God, and have no access to God, and will not be heard.

Their prayer is an abomination in the sight of God. Read Isaiah 1:10-15. *Hear the word of the LORD, You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the law of our God, You people of Gomorrah:* ¹¹ *“To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?” Says the LORD. “I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, Or of lambs or goats.* ¹² *“When you come to appear before Me, Who has required this from your hand, To trample My courts?*

¹³ *Bring no more futile sacrifices; Incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies -- I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting.* ¹⁴ *Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; They are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them.* ¹⁵ *When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear.*

If they, nevertheless, pray, thinking that they have access to God, they merely deceive themselves, knowing neither themselves nor God. Before man can confidently approach God in prayer with the assurance of our text, *whatever we ask we receive from Him,* the condemnation of our own heart must be taken away, sin must be removed, and thus we must become true, *“of the truth”* as verse 19 states.

The good news is that sin has been removed by Jesus Christ. This is His Active and passive obedience. He has fulfilled all righteousness for us. He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. And now all, having sinned and falling short of the glory of God, are *“being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,* ²⁵ *whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith.”*⁷

“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand.”⁸ People who by faith receive this merit of Christ and in such faith serve Him in deed and in truth are as our text says, ***“of the truth.”*** As our text says, we ***shall assure our hearts before Him***. The believer, and the believer only, can have confidence toward God in prayer; ***There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.*⁹**

However, it is exactly of these people that the Apostle says in our text, ***if our heart condemns us***. Yes! also Christians, sincere Christians, walking in the truth, are still sinners and far from being perfectly holy. Daily we sin much because of the weakness of our flesh, not because we want to, but in spite of our most earnest struggle against sin.

We love God, and yet constantly fall short of the glory of God. We live to God, and yet cannot reach perfection. And so it may happen that in the midst of truthful efforts the Christian’s heart condemns him, his conscience accuses him, and Satan attempts to rob him of His Christian assurance and confidence toward God.

As the Christian observes his heart and listens to the voice of his conscience, he must pronounce its judgment correct. Out of his heart proceeds innumerable evil thoughts and desires; out of his mouth, corrupt talk; many of his deeds are outright breakings of the divine Law, and even his best works are imperfect.

And if now a Christian is led, or rather misled, to judge his state of grace and acceptance with God according to the accusations and condemnations of his own heart, he will lose all assurance and confidence toward God, especially as he tries to approach the throne of God in prayer. The experienced Christian certainly has been through such agonising afflictions.

However, we are not to judge our state of grace and acceptance with God according to the judgment of our own heart, but rather according to the judgment of God.

The Apostle says in our text, ***²⁰For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things***. God is greater than our heart; not the judgment of our heart, but God’s judgment is decisive. God passes sentence upon the Christian, not according to the Law, which condemns, but according to the

Gospel, which declares those people righteous who have received the forgiveness of sins, which Christ has earned.

The state of the Christian is not a state of merit, but of grace. Not our amends and sacrifices can quiet and assure our conscience, which would only continue to cry, as did Luther's conscience in those dreadful days of anguish in his life: "*Not enough! Not perfect!*" We can only have peace, rest and assurance in the heart, when we confess: "*I believe in the forgiveness of sins.*"

I have confidence toward God and am assured of His grace only because of His promise in Christ. We read in Isaiah 43:25, ²⁵ "***I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; And I will not remember your sins.***" This word must prevail because God is the Judge and not my afflicted heart.

And though my heart says no and never, God's Word to me is surer ever. Thus the accusing voice of the conscience is silenced, assurance is regained, the condition of the heart restored which the Apostle describes in these words, ***Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.***

In this assurance we may with all boldness and confidence approach God in prayer, persuaded that He will hear us, that "***whatever we ask we receive from Him.***" As Luther's *Small Catechism* states, ¹⁰ we pray "*with confidence, that is, with firm trust that for Jesus' sake our prayer will be answered.*" Jesus says in Matthew 21:22, ²² "***And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.***"

The hymnist writes, ¹¹

Come, my soul, thy suit prepare:
Jesus loves to answer prayer;
He Himself has bid thee pray,
Therefore will not say thee nay.

Thou art coming to a king:
Large petitions with thee bring;
For His grace and power are such,
None can ever ask too much.

2. Christians Have Confidence Toward God In Prayer

Because By The Holy Spirit They Dwell In God And God In Them

More assurance to strengthen confidence toward God in prayer is given in our text. The Apostle says, *And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.*

But at hearing these words the condemning heart tries to gain supremacy again. It says: *Don't you see that this is exactly what you are not doing: You are not keeping God's commandments and often fail to do those things that are pleasing in God's sight?*

But, Christian, listen to what commandment the Apostle has in mind. It is the first and greatest commandment, the Gospel command. He says in our text, *And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ.* In Christ you believe, do you not? Indeed, you answer, I do.

I do believe, and want to believe and rejoice in believing, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, whom the Father sent into this world to be my Redeemer, that He is the Lamb of God who has taken away the sin of the world, that His blood cleanses me from all sins, and that in Him I have the righteousness that avails before God.

Well, then, you are keeping His first and greatest commandment; and where this faith is, there believers will also *“love one another, as He gave us commandment.”* And whatever is remiss in their love is covered by the perfect righteousness which Christ earned for them and which is theirs by faith in Christ Jesus.

And now the Apostle says, *Now he who keeps His commandments*, that is, as we just learned, he who believes in Jesus Christ, dwells in Him, and He in him. The believer dwells in Christ and Christ in Him. He is Christ's own.

As surely as Christ is God's own Son, so surely the Christian is God's dear child. Scripture says in Galatians 3:26, ²⁶ *For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.* And God cannot forsake His children. He cannot leave His children's prayer unanswered. He cannot be worse, rather He is infinitely greater, than a human father. God says in Isaiah 49:15, ¹⁵ *“Can a woman forget*

her nursing child, And not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, Yet I will not forget you.

Our text closes with the words. *And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.* You believe in Jesus, your Saviour. But you cannot by your own reason or strength believe in Him. Scripture says in 1 Corinthians 12:3 *that no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.*

Well, then, as surely as you believe, so surely the Holy Spirit was given you, by Whom alone you were brought to faith. And this Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God. *For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."*¹² *¹⁶ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs -- heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.*

Confidence toward God in prayer is surely increased by this fact. And of this Spirit of God the Apostle Paul again writes to the Romans,²⁶ *Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*¹³

Even our faulty prayers the Holy Spirit makes perfect; and when we do not know what to pray for, He Himself will put proper content into our prayers. Surely, *"whatever we ask we receive from Him."*

Happy is the person, you say, who can get everything he asks for! No, not necessarily. If he were to ask for something, thinking it to be a useful, it may not be a blessing for him to receive it. And where is the person who is so all-knowing that he would not at times ask for something, thinking it to be a blessing but instead it would be a hindrance?

Yes, there is such a person — the child of God. He keeps the commandments of God. He does those things that are pleasing in God's sight. The same loyalty which marks all his deeds will also mark his prayers.

His Christian faith will make him wise to understand that the final decision as to things which God has not directly promised must be placed into the will of the Lord. He knows that God *knows all things* and that He knows best.

The desire, therefore, that overrules and overshadows all his prayers is this, that God should give him only that which is in harmony with His good and gracious will.

Oh, what a Friend we have in Jesus! What a dear heavenly Father! What a Spirit of Comfort!

We can pour out the whole burden of our soul to a Friend who will never misunderstand us, who will overrule even our own foolishness and ignorance in prayer to the giving of a good and perfect gift.

Therefore, O Christian, pray! *Rogate!* ***“Pray without ceasing.”***¹⁴
“Continue steadfastly in prayer.”¹⁵ Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Matt. 7:7-8; 1 Thess. 5:17; Rom. 12:12

² Luke 11:9

³ John 16:23-24

⁴ John 14:13-14

⁵ Romans 3:22-23

⁶ Isaiah 64:6

⁷ Rom. 3:24-25

⁸ Rom. 5:1-2

⁹ Romans 8:1

¹⁰ *Luther's Small Catechism*, Q 198B, 1991 Edition

¹¹ Hymn 420

¹² Romans 8:15

¹³ Romans 8:26

¹⁴ 1 Thessalonians 5:17

¹⁵ Romans 12:12