Lesson Seven: **1 John 5:13-21** The True God

*(extracted from The Letters of John by N. T. Wright)*

1. *Read 1 John 5:13-21*. Why does John say we can have confidence in our prayers (vv. 13-15)?
2. Why might a Christian doubt that he or she has “the life of the age to come” (v. 13)?
3. How do you discern whether you are praying “according to his will” (v. 14)?
4. Most of our prayers concern the future, what we want to see happen or what we want God to do for us or for someone else. When we pray to God about the future, in what sense do we “already possess the requests we have asked from him” (v. 15)?

Those who believe in Jesus, who abide in God, stand at the place where heaven and earth meet. They are encouraged to draw down the blessings of heaven into the life of earth, and to know as they make their requests that they have already been granted – even though, as Scripture itself and Christian experience both teach, they may be granted in ways one had not expected.

1. How is verse 16 an encouragement to keep praying even when we see people going in a wrong direction?

It’s hard to know exactly where John draws the line between sin which is “deadly” and sin which is “not deadly” (vv. 16-17). Perhaps he means that those who deny that Jesus has come in the flesh have committed a sin which puts them beyond the reach of redemption, since they have cut off the branch from which the fresh shoots of rescue-promises are growing.

1. One of the comforting things about verses 16-17 is the light they shed on verse 18. Without this, we might suppose that John thinks all Christians have stopped sinning altogether; with it, it is clear that he means, as I translate it, “everyone fathered by God *does not* *go on sinning*.” It is the continuous habit of life that concerns John. Clearly he would rather one did not sin at all; but occasional sins, a blip on the chart, can be prayed for, can be confessed and forgiven. They are quite different from the hard-hearted sin which carries on regardless, and which, as in Romans 1:32, even comes to see the action in question as not sinful at all.

In verse 18 John twice uses the phrase “fathered by God.” Who is he referring to in each case, and what is the connection between the two halves of the verse?

1. As he draws his letter to a close, John writes that “the whole world is under the power of the evil one” (v. 19). It doesn’t sound like he is going to wrap things up in a positive or hopeful way; but as you consider his letter as a whole, what gives you hope for continuing to live in such a world?

Believers are “everyone fathered by God,” but Jesus is “The One *par excellence* who is Fathered by God.” Jesus will keep believers under his protection, so that the evil one, who for the moment retains power over the world, cannot do them harm. It may not always feel like that. But part of the victory of faith (1 John 5:4) is believing that Jesus has in fact defeated all the powers that might endanger us, and that we are “in him” and so “in the truth,” as opposed to being “in the lie,” the lie of which the world has done us best to persuade us.

1. Sometimes a short story writer tells a story cleverly so as to lead us in one direction, and then, with the last sentence, reveals something which changes everything. I don’t think John intends to play a trick on his readers, but the final sentence of this remarkable little letter causes us to think back through what he has written to see where this apparently new idea comes from.

Why do you think John concludes his letter with the admonition “Children guard yourselves against idols” (v. 21)?

1. What are the most troublesome or persistent idols which we must guard against?
2. What are some marks of “the life of the age to come” (v. 20) which you most admire in other Christians?
3. What marks of “the life of the age to come” do you hope other people see in you?

**PRAY**

Taking 1 John 5:13-15 for a model, **pray** confidently and boldly for other people, especially for anyone you know under the sway of sin.

**Pray** confidently and boldly for yourself, that you will be guarded against the idolatry of false ideas about God.

**Pray** confidently and boldly that the “life of the age to come” will be obvious to those who meet you, here and now.