

INTRODUCTION

As a consumer, we like to get our money's worth. The stingy guy inside me often wants to pay the least but expects the most. Once I bought a can-opener from a dollar shop. It fell apart the very first time I used it. The kitchen tool thus became a piece of recycled metal. To this day, my wife still makes fun of me for my dumb mistake. But I redeemed myself later by buying a TV antenna from the same dollar store. It actually worked! We are often surprised by joy when we discover hidden features in the items we bought. A story was told that a man dreamed of having a cruise vacation. Finally, he saved up enough money to board a ship. He was happy to get the smallest cabin with a tiny window to peek at the ocean. On the final day of his trip, he was bathing under the sun on the deck. He was munching some stale bread to go with water from a fountain. He barely had any money left to stock up food for his journey. He envied other tourists because they enjoyed fancy drink and dined in restaurants with unlimited supply of delicacies. When he was still day-dreaming about it, a waiter passed by and collected some leftover food items near him. "That guy must be super rich." He grumbled to the waiter. "He hardly took a few bites. What a waste!" The worker responded: "You know, sir, it happens all the time when people know that they can have all the food they want for free." Free? Now our friend knew what he had been missing the whole time. I wonder if that may be the response from some Christians when they arrive in heaven. They marveled: "Lord, I have no idea that I could enjoy those blessings after I was saved." Health and wealth are of course God's blessings, but God never guarantees those benefits to every believer. However, every Christian can enjoy God's presence in their lives the moment they are saved. As John concluded his letter, he told his readers and us that as God's children, we must cherish our personal relationship with Him. He mentioned three privileges that God blesses us with.

EXPLANATION

1. Pray 禱告

The first privilege God gives us as His children is to pray to Him. John told us in **verse 14**: This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. John elaborated in the next verse that not only does God hear our prayer, He will also answer us. Here it lies the 12th proof to verify that we are Christians. Believers are those whom God promises to answer their prayers based on His will. John said that we should have such "confidence" when we pray to God. This confidence is not from us. We have nothing in our merits as redeemed sinners that God should listen to us. The confidence comes from God's promise. This is actually the second time John mentioned in the book about the confidence we should have in our prayer. He stated in **3:21-22** – 21 Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God 22 and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him. The same requirement is repeated, that we should pray according to God's will. But here, John added another condition for God to listen to us. John said that we have to obey His commands. What commands? In chapter 3, John told us that we have to love God by showing our love to brothers and sisters. If we know a church member who has

needs and we have the capability to help that person, then we should show our love by action. According to John, if we carry out God's command to love others, then we should have confidence that God will hear us when we ask Him for help. Of course, John did not suggest us to use love actions toward others as a bargaining chip in our prayer. We should not negotiate with the Lord, saying: "Let me remind you what I did for Rob. I guess it's time for you to return the favor." I hope that your love actions will come as natural as breathing, that you do not even remember your good deeds done for others. Let our church be filled with more love for God and His people. The motive for love should not be gaining what we want. But the foundation of love is a healthy relationship. When Jesus was still on the earth, He showed us that His confidence in prayer was based on an intimate relationship with the Father. Jesus said in [John 11:41-42](#) – 41 ... "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." In the context, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Jesus prayed in public for the crowd to witness the power in His prayer and His relationship with the Father. As a result, Lazarus was brought back to life and many people believed in Jesus. Let me ask you this: what is the intent behind your prayer? We do not need anyone to remind us to pray for our personal needs: health, career, relationship with family members, etc. There is nothing wrong about those requests. But the hope to receive God's blessings is only part of the purpose. The ultimate goal of our prayer should be for God's glory. We pray that God's will, not our will, be done. We pray that people around us can see that God is real and we have a close relationship with Him. When God answers your prayer, you can share with people that it is God who helps you find a good doctor to restore your health. It is God who gives you talents to do well in your job. Then we go a step further and ask how God can use His blessings to us to bless others. For example, God gives you good health to enable you to serve in more ministries. He gives you a promotion so that you can witness to the colleagues in another department. God gives you a bigger pay-check so that you can have financial freedom to support ministries. Our prayer is no longer a means to get what we want, but a process for us to participate in God's plan.

2. Plead 代求

God gives His children the privilege to pray. Next, John asked us to use such privilege to plead for others. He said in [verse 16](#): If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that. This may be the most difficult verse to understand in the whole book. What was John getting at? He described two situations here. Scenario one: a brother, that also includes a sister, falls into a sin that does not lead to death. John's instruction is to pray for that believer so that God will give the person life. Scenario two: someone commits a sin that leads to death. John's advice is that we should not pray for that. That much is quite straightforward. We will further investigate the first scenario. The person in question is a believer. If your theology is the same as mine, then there is no sin a Christian can commit so serious that he/she will suffer spiritual death, meaning to lose salvation. However, there are sins that a believer can fall into that may lead to physical death. There are many Biblical examples where God used death as a means to discipline His people when they did not repent. We often read 1 Corinthians 11 when we observe the communion. In [verses 29-30](#), Paul said: 29 For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. 30 That is why many among you are weak and sick,

and a number of you have fallen asleep. In the NIV translation “fallen asleep” means death. Paul warned believers in the Corinth church who showed contempt at the communion table. They made the meeting into a party feast and some of them even got drunk. God disciplined them by striking some of them dead, not because they were ignorant of the Lord’s Supper, but because they were being disrespectful. John told his readers that if they were aware of a sin like that, then they should plead for the offender. Why did John ask the believers to plead for the sinner, when the person could pray for himself/herself? Perhaps the person was not aware of the offense, or he/she was too stubborn to repent. The instruction to plead for others points to the communal aspect of a church. Sin does not only affect our personal relationship with God. Prominent sins will also impact the testimony of the whole church. Satan knows how to lure us into sin, then tear down a church. The Bible clearly tells us that we have an obligation to restore a wayward Christian. We do so with love and gentleness. We should plead for the sinner. We confront the facts, instead of spreading rumor. The purposes are to help the sinner repent of the wrongdoing and to preserve the purity of the church. Now we will deal with the second scenario. Let us look at the second half of **verse 16** again: ... There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that. What kind of sin did John refer to? Bible commentators have different opinions. I agree that one possible option that fits the context of book is the sin of disbelief. We mentioned the issue with the antichrists when we studied chapter 2. They were people who claimed to be Christians but they did not accept that Jesus came as a human. We said that the Mormons and the Jehovah’s Witnesses belong to the same camp. Their followers reject that Jesus is God. People who deny Christ will not be saved. Therefore, the “death” John had in mind is eternal death. John said that we should not pray for such situation. In John’s mind, those people were deliberately defiant in their belief. In chapter 2, John described them as people who “went out from us, but they did not really belong to us.” Therefore, they knew the Christian faith, but they chose to follow a false belief. There is nothing the church can do to change their hearts. Therefore, in comparison, the believers may as well focus on pleading for those who have fallen in sin, and hoping that they will confess and turn back. This is a concrete way to show our love for fellow believers.

3. Protect 保護

John told us that as God’s children, we have the privilege to pray for our needs and the privilege to plead for fellow church members. The third privilege we enjoy is protection from God. Let us look at **verses 18-19**: 18 We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him. 19 We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. We are constantly bombarded by messages from the fallen world: money, pleasure, self-centeredness and the so-called freedom. Even Christians can be confused, wondering if those pursuits are what life is all about. But Christian life should be about serving God, not serving ourselves. John told us two ways to live a victorious life over sin. First, he said that “anyone born of God does not continue to sin.” He told us the same truth back in chapter 3. Christians will definitely commit sin. However, believers will not indulge in sins unceasingly as if they were not saved because God lives in them. Second, John told us that “the one who was born of God keeps him safe.” We need to ask: who is keeping whom safe? I put a few major Bible translations on the screen for comparison. The way the Chinese Union Version renders the verse indicates that it is the believers who protect themselves from Satan. That does not make Biblical sense. If we are being

honest to ourselves, we know how vulnerable we can be. The NIV, a few major English translations and the Chinese New Version all show that it is the Lord keeping us safe. This is a good example that we can compare different Bible translations when we have doubt about the meaning of a passage. It is Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, who protects us from temptation. In [John 17:15](#), Jesus prayed for His disciples and for us: “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.” Jesus does not take us to heaven the moment we accepted Him. Rather, He puts us in the world to witness for Him in our circle of influence. However, since we are still in contact with the world, we will be under Satan’s attack. Fear not! Jesus asked the Father to protect us. In fact, Jesus continues to pray for us even after He rose from the dead and ascended to heaven. Paul stated that in [Romans 8:34](#) - Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died - more than that, who was raised to life - is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Jesus is praying continually for you and me. Brothers and sisters: think about that for a moment. Very often, we do not feel secure in our prayer, wondering if our wish coincides with God’s will. Jesus does not have to worry about that. He and the Heavenly Father agree on everything. Jesus knows our weaknesses and our needs. Even when we do not know how to pray for ourselves, He presents our case before the Father. Since we have such a perfect middleman to the Father, should we not seek His protection when we face temptation? We will be a fool if we think that we can fight against Satan’s crafty schemes by our power. Instead, we should cry out to God: “Lord, please strengthen me. Give me the courage to stand up for You. Grant me wisdom from Your Word so that I won’t compromise my faith. Show me a way out so that I can escape from Satan’s enticement.” God will be by our side when we seek His protection. That actually ties in to what John said when he began his letter. Christian life is about having fellowship with God. Any lone-ranger believer will be defeated by the devil. We have to remain in the Lord by reading His Word and praying to Him. The light from God’s Word will reveal the dark corners of our hearts. The Holy Spirit will nudge us to repent even when we commit sins. Having a close fellowship with God is the only way to go under His protection. There is no short-cut and there is no alternative.

CONCLUSION

John told us that as God’s children, we must cherish our personal relationship with Him. God gives us such wonderful privileges to pray to Him, to plead for fellow believers and to seek His protection over sins. God grace is sufficient. God gives us those blessings to use in this life. Recently, someone put his car up for auction. Car lovers among us should be able to tell what car it is. It is a 1994 model. That is only one of the many cars the owner stores in a climate-controlled facility. The man keeps his automobiles like new. The problem is, the car is way too new, because it only has 187 miles on it! A reporter shared his opinion: “I don’t see a collector’s item - I see 25 years of all but unmatched driving fun that someone missed out on.” He has a suggestion for the buyer. Instead of preserving the car in a garage. He said: “drive it until it dies.” The car is finally sold for \$ 151,000. That is more than double than the original price. The manufacturer redesigned a new model in recent years. For the same money, you can buy a slightly used 2018 model. Which one will you choose? Some people see cars like artwork to preserve and behold, while others treat them as machines on four wheels to be driven on the roads. “Children of God” should not be a title for us to use in the church. God does not want us to display a ticket to heaven in a trophy case either. Christian life should be about walking closely with God, and to enjoy His presence in our daily life.