

Prayer

Gracious Father, the mysteries of the Universe lie within You, and time itself lies spread before You like a map. Thank You for creating each of us within our mothers' wombs, and for placing us within Your beautiful world. Through our salvation, may we all come to know our place within Your strategy for the destiny of the world; and may we honour what You have done in each of us, to Your praise and glory. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Secularism

Pray for the newspapers and media who influence the lives of many people whilst trying to report impartial truth. Pray that those with influence do not ignore Godliness and truth.

On-going prayers

- *Pray that Christians will heed the prophecies being given about our world today*
- *Give thanks for the blessing of life that God has given you*
- *Pray for the leaders of your country*

Meditation

Sometimes, life can become too much.
Unhappiness becomes a wall, un-scalable,
Impossible to climb; depressing.

The illusion of gloom suggests no world beyond,
To be seen or heard or sensed in any way;
For who can hope for that which lies beyond experience?
Who anticipates that what is now can ever truly change?

Stand forever hopeless,
Or let God's Spirit take you to your knees

Give up mortal limitations to His greater power
Yield all self-obsession to His boundless kindness
Do what never happens naturally; let go of self.

Give permission to the One who loves you
Let Him break the boundaries, the walls, the chains,
And let His glory penetrate impossible extremes
To let you touch the hope of better things, because they're real.

Bible Study - 1 John 2:12-14

¹² *I am writing to you, little children,
because your sins are forgiven because of His name.*

¹³ *I am writing to you, fathers,
because you have known Him who is from the beginning.
I am writing to you, young people,
because you have overcome the evil one.*

¹⁴ *I write to you, children,*

*because you have known the Father.
I write to you, fathers,
because you have known Him who is from the beginning.
I write to you, young people,
because you are strong and the Word of God abides in you,
and you have overcome the evil one.*

Review

These three verses are an appeal to the readers of the letter to listen and heed its message. John had just set out one of the key points within his letter, the command of Jesus to 'love one another' (2:7-11), based on the classic commands of the Old Testament that reflect the love of God. However, John had applied it to the life of the church in the most pointed way possible, by emphasising what happens when love is ignored; 'whoever hates a fellow believer is in the darkness ... and does not know where he is going' (2:11). It is not surprising that he now appeals to his readers to pay attention, with words that are powerful, but potentially more encouraging!

There are great differences of opinion between people about how our passage should be interpreted, and before we interpret it further, we need to clear up exactly what John is trying to say here and to whom. The passage has been set out like Hebrew poetry, because it is likely that John did indeed use this method of writing for emphasis. It is easy to see that verses 12 and 13 contain three stanzas addressing little children, fathers and young people, and then verse 14 repeats the same pattern. Quite naturally, some people think that 'children', 'fathers' and 'young people' are three groups within the church, and John wants to give each of them a different word; they suggest that there were differences of opinion between age groups, and John was trying to address this. Logically, however, we might have expected the three groups to have been addressed in age order if age was the case, and whilst we can imagine differences between young people and an older generation, why would John be concerned about the opinions or feeling of little children (the word means those below six or seven).

On the other hand, John addressed all those in his churches as 'children' (see 2:1, 2:18, 3:2 etc.). Moreover the word for 'fathers' means something like 'parent' rather than the more revered word for those of advanced years (normally 'elders'), and the word for 'young men' means those in the prime of life (in their twenties), many of whom would be parents! Because of the way that all these words overlap, and the added possibility that John was speaking to church members not in terms of 'age' but in terms of experience as Christians, I prefer to think that John was using a poetic method of saying something important in three different ways to the entire church fellowship! Because of this, and the fact that it all comes after John's terse comment about those who hate a fellow believer, I suggest our passage is best understood in this way, as follows.

Firstly, speaking to all those in the church he founded, his 'children', John urged them to remember that they were all forgiven sinners who knew the love of God the Father (2:12). Surely this fact alone was sufficient to bring a halt to any hatred of other Christians. This message is the same as that found in Jesus' famous parable of the dishonest servant; 'should you not have mercy on your fellow servant as I had mercy on you?' (Matt 18:33). Subsequently, John appealed to the 'fathers', as long standing members of the church who had themselves won converts ('children'). Surely, the fruit of their lives as God's people was evidence that they knew the love of 'Him who is from the beginning', and they did not need the truth about love and hatred spelt out for them. Lastly, John addressed those young yet adult Christians, full of potential in the service of the Gospel. To these he spoke encouragingly as ones who had 'overcome the evil one' (2:13). Overcoming has always

been a key aspect of Christian work and ministry, and John stressed this in the second half of this great poem (2:14); 'because you are strong and the Word of God abides in you'. For John, of course, the 'Word of God' was none other than Jesus (see John 1), and this last comment has a clear meaning. How can anyone who has Jesus Christ dwelling within them also hate a brother or sister in Christ? The very notion is impossible. To live in the presence of Jesus and overcome the evil one are supreme privileges of active Christian worship and witness, and utterly incompatible with hatred!

The interpretation of this passage will probably always remain controversial, because people will always read this text and see different things in it. However, the sheer logic of what John says to all three supposed 'groups' will hopefully prevent us dwelling too much on the finer details of any divisions they may represent in the church!

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Imagine yourself as a new Christian, a 'child' in faith. What then does this text mean to you?
2. Imagine yourself as a 'father' or 'parent', one who has helped add converts to the faith. What then does this text mean to you?
3. Imagine yourself as an active church member full of zeal as a Christian. What then does this text mean to you?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

As one who has been in the church for a long time and has seen people become Christians and helped them, I can personally identify with the 'fathers' in this passage. As a child of God, I can identify with the 'children' as well because I know that I still have a great deal to learn about my faith and what God has for me to do. I find it harder to identify with the 'young men', or 'young people' of this passage because I do not feel very active, but I know I must work at this, because I still do a great deal of work for the Lord and for the church of God. The message remains uncompromising, nevertheless, I must stand firm in faith and against the evil one, and I cannot let hatred into my life.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Try doing the same exercise I have done in the comments immediately above, and see where this leads you. Let the Lord challenge you to think differently about yourself, and about how you handle the message of this text about love.*
- *Pray for the unity of God's people, the church, and pray that all God's people might learn to appreciate their role in the life of the church.*

Final Prayer

Almighty and ever living God; You made the world in love, and it must break Your heart to see the mess we have made of what You have made for our benefit, our enjoyment and our blessing. Fill us with Your Holy Spirit so that we can connect with the blessings You have for us in all life, especially in Scriptures, and within our prayers. AMEN