

Prayer

I rejoice in You, Lord Jesus, my Lord and my God! I will give You glory come what may, even when I do not feel like doing it, for it is both my duty as well as my delight. I seek to do Your will, and I wait expectantly for the enabling power of Your Spirit that fills me and leads me on to do what God requires. Glory be to You Lord Jesus, my Lord and my God! AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Liberty

Pray that people in countries where there is great liberty will not abuse the privilege they enjoy, but value the Christian heritage that has given these freedoms and preserve it.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for industrialists as they face ethical and environmental dilemmas*
- *Give thanks for the young people and children in your wider family*
- *Pray for people in China whose liberties have been compromised*

Meditation

Can you see the sadness?
What has happened to our glorious liberties,
If youngsters, barely old enough
To know a world much larger than their mind
Find life so insecure they sport a weapon?

Can you see the sadness?
What has happened to our social consciousness,
If aged men and women,
Having given all to life and life to others,
Must sell their homes to stay alive with dignity?

Can you see the sadness?
What has happened to our fairer principles,
If those who make our laws
Make riches for themselves, and value power
Far more highly than integrity and truthfulness!

Can you see the Gospel?
What has happened to our churches
If those of faith who worship
Will not confront the world, as Christ commissioned
Sacrificing all for love and justice in a world of evil?

Bible Study - 1 John 3:11-17

¹¹ This is the message you have heard from the beginning; that we should love one another, ¹² and not be like Cain who was from the evil one and murdered his brother. Why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and those of his brother were righteous. ¹³ Do not be surprised, fellow believers, if the world hates you. ¹⁴ We know that we have passed over from death to life because we love fellow believers; whoever does not love abides in death. ¹⁵ Those who hate a fellow believer are murderers, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. ¹⁶ This is how we know what love is, that He laid down his life for us; and so we should to lay down our lives for fellow believers; ¹⁷ but if someone has worldly means and notices that a fellow believer is needy, yet closes his heart to him, how does the love of God dwell in him?

Review

In yesterday's passage from John's letter, we read the plain truth that sin is incompatible with the presence of Christ within; it is something that a person of faith cannot accept (3:4-10). The blunt way John states this has given people problems over the years, and yet what he says remains utterly true, especially when it comes to relationships between people. Our passage today reveals that as John spoke these things, he was thinking about the terrible evils that can exist within a fellowship when people hate each other. Unfortunately, most of us will be aware of the animosities beneath the surface of our church communities, and also between believers of various communities, and this passage is a stern but proper challenge to such ill feeling.

John took a straightforward route to illustrating this. The whole of his letter assumes that the people know the command of Christ, to 'love one another' (3:11), so John used an illustration from the Bible that is the first example of failure to do just this. Cain and Abel were the two sons of Adam and Eve (Genesis 4), and in a classic story of jealousy and rage, Cain murdered his brother because God 'favoured' Abel's offering (Gen 4:4f.). The sin of petty envy built up within Cain until he could not bear his own brother, and he murdered him with no thought for the consequences. Because this story was well known, John knew that people would easily make the connection between the terrible sin of murder and the 'little' sin of envy that led to it, and it remains true to this day.

We can imagine that in answer to what John said about sin being incompatible with the Christian life (3:4-10), some would have said that 'small sins' (such as negative attitudes) were a part of life, so why should people be condemned because of them. John's answer is clear enough; every sin is dangerous because it leads to death, just as hating or despising can lead to murder. John summarised his point in verse 15;

'Those who hate a fellow believer are murderers, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.' (1 John 3:15)

As we read this, we are reminded of the teaching of Jesus. When He began to teach the 'Sermon on the Mount', He spoke firmly about the same issues, and linked the heinous sin of murder and hatred, as below;

"You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the fires of hell!" (Matthew 5:21-22)

The point is well made by both Jesus and John, so we can hardly dismiss the Biblical teaching that negative attitudes falling short of the love of God can quickly lead to evils, even the sin of murder. Now, we may not know about many murders in the life of the church, but most will know of people whose lives have been all but destroyed by the hatred of another Christian; and this remains a grievous sin within the church.

Our passage is not entirely negative. As he makes his point, John reinforces a message that is also found in the writings of Paul, which is that we know the nature of God's love because Jesus laid down His life for us (see Romans 5:6-11). John says that this is the example of true love that all Christians should seek to emulate, and it is most challenging when we realize that Jesus laid down His life for people who hated Him; so we are called to do the same. We are called to 'lay down our lives' for those within our fellowship with whom we have the greatest difficulty; no less. John's final example is stunning; he asks, how can the love of God be said to dwell within a believer who has much and offers little (3:17)? We do not have to read the passage twice to understand the point made.

We should never allow ourselves to think that love is sentimental, or easy, or something to be taken for granted. Only love conquers sin, and real love requires effort and sacrifice. If we do not know this from John's letter, let alone the rest of the New Testament, then we have missed its essential truths!

Questions (for use in groups)

1. How easy is it to love people who we find difficult? How do we do this? In your group, share examples of how this can be done.
2. How and why does the world 'hate us' (3:13)? What does this comment of John's mean in this passage?
3. Discuss what it might mean to 'lay down one's life' for a friend or for someone within your church fellowship.

Discipleship

Personal comment:

It is impossible to read this passage and not be challenged to think about people I have found really difficult in the past. I am not sure that I would use the word 'hatred' of my attitude towards anyone, but I do know that I have felt very negatively about a number of people who have, from my point of view, acted 'out of order' and made life difficult either for me or for my ministry. I reckon that the only practical way I can respond to the situation is that where I either have contact with such people (for many are now well beyond my ability to track them), I must make sure my attitude towards them is forgiving in any conversation or contact. Of course, I should have that attitude towards others anyway, but I must make especially sure that it prevails in my dealing with these people, lest sin gains a grip on me.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Search your own soul for those you have 'hated' or had difficulty with over the years. The Lord will lead you to those you need to deal with, either by some act of kindness or reconciliation, or simply by having an attitude of love.*
- *Pray for any situations you know of at your church, where people really find each other very difficult and there are clear animosities. Pray that the message of the Gospel will help solve these difficulties.*

Final Prayer

Help me Lord God, to make sense of what you are teaching me this day. Show me how to be as 'wise as a serpent and gentle as a dove'. Give me the eyes of an eagle to see Satan prowling around like a roaring lion, and strengthen my heart so that love motivates my every deed. I seek this for Your glory; AMEN
