

Prayer

We offer you thanks and praise, Almighty God, for all the help, the healing, the comfort, the challenge, the care and the strength You have given us. All too often, we are not aware of Your help until after it has been given; forgive our ignorance, and help us to be sensitive to the ways in which You help us. Thank You, Almighty God and Father; AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Liberty

Pray for the people of the poorer nations of the world whose lives are blighted by both poverty and the lack of good government working for them, for their interests, and their liberty.

On-going prayers

- Give thanks for the young people and children in your wider family
- Pray for people in China whose liberties have been compromised
- Pray against the evils that are oppressing humanity today

Meditation

Are we available when the Lord requires?

Or, being otherwise occupied,

Do we fit the needs of God's Kingdom

Around a personal social calendar?

Are we available when the Lord requires?

Or, being too tired or sometimes lazy,

Do we stall, and put His work off 'till tomorrow

Because we don't want to do it today?

Are we available when the Lord requires?

Or, being otherwise minded,

Do we imagine that the things we normally do

Are more important than a call to holy living?

Are we available when the Lord requires?

Or, being blind to His Kingdom

Do we hold on to the temptations of the world

Because we've long since sold our souls?

So the Lord still calls, awaiting our response;

Be ready, for time does not wait forever.

Bible Study - 1 John 3:4-10

⁴ Everyone who commits a sin acts contrary to the law; for sin is lawlessness. ⁵ You know that He was revealed to remove sins, and in Him there is no sin. ⁶ No one who abides in Him sins, and those who sin have neither seen him or known him. ⁷ Little children, let no one lead you astray. Whoever does what is right is righteous, just as He is righteous; ⁸ and whoever commits sin is of the devil; for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The Son of God was revealed in order to destroy the works of the devil. ⁹ No one born of God commits sin because God's nature abides in him; he is not able to sin, because he has been born of God. ¹⁰ This is how the children of God and the children of the devil are revealed: whoever does not do what is righteous is not from God, nor is anyone who does not love a fellow believer.

Review

Some believe this to be the heart of John's letter, because it states in uncompromising language the message that sin has no part in the life of a believer. It offers a message saying that for one who is a Christian, any sin is unacceptable; indeed, it should be impossible. Some find this to be an extreme 'counsel

of perfection' setting a standard of faith and practice too high for ordinary people; the passage has been quoted by many who feel that they cannot reach such standards, and prefer to sit on the sidelines of faith.

It is understandable that some might react like this to what John says, but it is unfortunate. His abrupt style of writing forces the translator to convey his message in this extreme way, but we must still treat it with care and consideration. For example, it is not true to conclude from this passage that if you are Christian and you commit a sin, then you must be a child of the devil! What John says is far more subtle than this, and we would be foolish to think such a thing, for the obvious reason that elsewhere in his letter, John says that anyone who says he 'does not sin' is a liar (1:10)! At the very least, this should make us realise that we must read what John says with care if we are to grasp his meaning.

To begin with, the whole of the Bible speaks of the incompatibility of the things of God and the things of evil. For example, Jesus says, 'a sound tree cannot bear bad fruit' (Matt 7:18), and Paul, who generally avoids saying anything 'perfectionist', says of those who are baptised, 'for he who has died is freed from sin' (Romans 6:7). The Gospel of Christ says precisely this, that we who live in this world are affected by sin, but that Jesus can remove the root of this sin within us and its power to separate us from God, and this is something all of us need on a regular basis. Indeed, John has already set out how this may be done, in the very first chapter of his letter:

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1:8,9)

What then does John mean by now saying 'no one who abides in Him sins' (3:6)? The secret to our understanding this passage is hidden within the word 'abide' (3:6,9), and also the fact that the Greek text of this letter describes someone's general state. Unfortunately, the Greek text is far more eloquent in its explanation of this than is possible in English! The word 'abide' means 'living permanently with', and it is used in two crucial phrases in this passage. Because of their importance, I will quote them below, and underneath each phrase, I will paraphrase its meaning as I understand it from the Greek:

No one who abides in Him sins, and those who sin have neither seen him or known him (3:6)

You cannot continue to sin with Jesus in your life, and if you do not know this, then you have not been given a clear understanding of who Jesus is or what sin is.

No one born of God commits sin because God's nature abides in him; he is not able to sin, because he has been born of God. (3:9)

The reason why you cannot continue to sin is because something of God's own nature dwells within you. Sin will feel wrong to you if you are someone who is 'born of God'.

Now, with this understanding, John's general point becomes clearer. Sin is exactly what we think it is, it is contrary to God and His indwelling presence; it is of the devil and God has come to destroy it. Consequently, when God dwells within us, any sin within us will become deeply uncomfortable. We will have to deal with it and get rid of it, and we will be spiritually unsatisfied until it has gone. A Christian is someone who cannot stand the presence of sin; and this cannot be a private matter because people will observe whether we do right or wrong. They will know whether we tolerate sin or not (3:10).

The real challenge of this passage to the believer is this; do you really want to live with sin? Because if you do, then you will have to make a choice between who you want to be, and who you can be in Christ!

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Discuss in your group how the Christian deals with sin; how is it done and how does it work?
2. Why do some people feel that Christianity is too 'perfectionist' for them, and how can we help people overcome such feelings?
3. Is there any encouragement in your church to identify and deal with sin other than listening to preachers and doing it privately?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

Whenever I explain this, it makes perfect sense to me, but I know that many others will remain sceptical. The trouble is that we spend too much time looking at each other and trying to gauge how we live according to what we see in others instead of what we see in Christ. This passage does in fact ask us not to look at

how other people deal with sin, but to accept that sin is exactly what God says it is, and by and large, most of us know what needs to be dealt with in our lives. Instead of being worried about what others will think, we should leave ourselves open to the glare of Christ's light, and let Him reveal our sin.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Read through this passage and try to find a place of peace where you feel that you understand it and how you fit into what it says. This can be hard if you are conscious of sin, but it is John's intention to oblige us to face real issues of faith.*
- *Pray for people you know who are on the edge of faith, and find it hard to accept the challenge of dealing with sin and living with Christ.*

Final Prayer

You are our healer, Lord Jesus. You made each one of us and You know everything about why we are the people that we are. We commit ourselves into Your hands and we ask You to heal our damaged bodies and heal our wounded souls, so that we might have peace with ourselves, with others and with You. Thank You Lord Jesus, AMEN
