

## Prayer

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

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Church Unity

*Pray for a movement of God's Spirit that will bring His people together from across the churches, to witness to Jesus and the power of the Gospel to change the world for the better.*

### On-going prayers

- *Pray for Aung San Sui, the opposition leader on trial in Burma*
- *Give thanks for the Holy Spirit and His work of renewal within you*
- *Pray for God's blessing on our endeavours to reduce waste*

## Meditation

Show us Your glorious power O Lord!

Come to the help of those who really need You.

Come to the aid of the poor and disadvantaged,  
Raise them up and show them Your love!

Come to the aid of Your downtrodden people,  
Renew Your church and rekindle its zeal!

Come to the aid of the sick and distressed,  
Restore them; touch, heal and deliver them!

Come to the aid of those who do not know You,  
Rescue them, love them, and lead them to faith!

Come to the aid of Your people who wait for You,  
Revive their hope and prepare them for glory!

When You act in Your glorious power, O Lord  
All things are possible through Your care and love.

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## Bible Study - 1 John 4:13-21

<sup>13</sup> By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us; He has given us of His Spirit, <sup>14</sup> and we have seen and testify that the Father has sent His Son, the Saviour of the world. <sup>15</sup> Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God, <sup>16</sup> and we have known and have faith in the love that God has for us.

God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. <sup>17</sup> This will be how love has been made perfect among us, that we may be confident on the day of judgment, for we are in this world just as He is. <sup>18</sup> There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been made perfect in love.

<sup>19</sup> We love because He first loved us. <sup>20</sup> If anyone should say, 'I love God,' yet hates his fellow believers, he is a liar; for he who does not love a fellow believer whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. <sup>21</sup> This is the commandment we have from Him: whoever loves God must love fellow believers as well.

## Review

This reading is from the heart of the message in John's first letter. It is about God's love; what it is, what it has done, and what it means for Christians. It follows on from the unique revelation; 'God is love' (4:8) and John's explanation of Christian discipleship, which says that God has loved us in Christ, so we must love

each other (4:11). Here, John reinforces this powerful message and firstly talks about the evidence of God's abiding love in the life of the believer (4:13-16). After this, he describes how love enables the believer to be 'confident on the day of judgement' (4:16-18), and lastly, he warns again about the hypocrisy of claiming to love God whilst failing to love others (4:19-21). John found it incomprehensible that anyone, in the light of what Jesus had done for them, should sustain hatred towards fellow believers.

It is easy to read this passage yet fail to spot how John's message works. There is an abundance of glorious texts; 'God is love ...' (4:8,16), 'perfect love casts out fear' (4:18), 'We love because He first loved us' (4:19). These phrases are powerful, and we hardly need to look further for inspiration! However, if we follow John's letter closely, we will find that deeper truths lie behind them.

To begin with, John knew that God's intention was to abide or dwell with His people and fill them with His love, so how could people know this? He explains in the first paragraph that the evidence of God's abiding presence is the Holy Spirit. Today, many Christians are unsure about what it means, but they were clearer about this in the days of the early church. For example, Paul expected people to know they had received the Holy Spirit when they were baptised and to find their lives radically changed, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit were regarded as clear signs of God's blessing (Acts 2,4,19,1 Cor 12,14). In our passage, John adds that the Holy Spirit empowers a Christian to testify to the truth of the Gospel (4:14), and confess that 'Jesus is the Son of God' (4:15); they are the evidence of God's abiding presence (4:16). This means that all Christians should expect to know what it means to receive the Holy Spirit from God and also to give testimony to their faith. Standing back from these issues will leave people disempowered and uncertain about the abiding presence of God.

The second paragraph repeats the great words 'God is love' (4:16), but goes on immediately to speak about what this means 'on the day of judgement' (4:17). The phrase 'this is how love has been made perfect among us' (4:17) is not easy to understand, but John was looking forward to the day when all people will face their Maker. How can we be confident that love is 'complete' in us and He will not punish us for our sins? The answer, says John, is that the love of God within us will remove this fear completely (4:18)! In His life, Jesus was not afraid of death because He had the love of God within Him, and we have this abiding love within us now because of what he did. As verse 18 says, people are naturally afraid if they believe God will punish them, but if the love of God abides within, then we have nothing to fear. The Greek language behind this passage is a little tricky, but the meaning is clear. The phrase 'perfect love casts out fear' is powerful and liberating, and it is even more so if we realise that this is true of our eternal destiny!

The final paragraph echoes what John has already said in 2:9f. and 3:15f., and attacks those who fail to show love within in Christian fellowship. To see the point repeated for the third time means that this must have been on John's mind, and it is therefore likely that in the life of the churches to which John wrote, this was a significant problem. All these passages use strong language; John called those who failed to love 'liars' (2:4, 4:20) and 'murderers' (3:15); but his words were more than insults. He said that such people proved by their words and deeds that they were not part of the Christian fellowship; God's love did not 'abide' in them (4:20).

The whole reading contains two wonderful assurances, firstly that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit proves our faith and the abiding love of God, and secondly that this love can remove our fears on the day of the Last Judgement. The last few verses are a warning to all Christians, but overall, John writes to urge us all to take hold of the privileges and assurance of God's love and grace.

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## Questions (for use in groups)

1. How do we know that we have received the Holy Spirit today? How do our churches recognise and encourage the work of the Holy Spirit?
2. Do people talk much about what will happen when we meet our Maker on the last Judgement Day? If not, why not?
3. Is it wise or right to expel someone from Christian fellowship if he or she will not recant from hatred towards another believer?

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*John's letter can be very hard to grasp. Some of the phrases within it are very powerful and inspiring, but it is difficult to try and find the themes and the trains of thought that connect everything that John says. As with many writers (including myself), John had certain things on his mind as he wrote, and sometimes they are*

evident within what he wrote and sometimes not. Yet God has used this letter in powerful ways, and I am not sure that the church today values these words as much as it should. There is always more to discover, and the effort to understand what John was really trying to say is always worth it

### **Ideas for exploring discipleship**

- *Ask yourself whether you feel confident about meeting God beyond this life. These days, this question is not often asked, and some find it offensive. However, I suggest you will be greatly blessed if you search through the Bible to find the many promises of God for our eternal blessing. Hopefully you will be reassured. Jesus died to give us eternal life.*
- *Pray for people of other faiths and ask the Lord to show you how to spread the Good News of God's love to people of different backgrounds cultures and faiths, without causing offence and thus being effective in witness.*

## **Final Prayer**

Jesus, You have lived on earth before us, and You already know its strains and stresses, yet through your life, You have given us a supreme example of love and care for others. Let us not be afraid of Your promise of eternal life, and may we greet this news with open hearts and minds, so that our God may bless us with the assurance of His grace. AMEN

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