

Prayer

We praise You Lord God, for You have empowered Your church to declare the truth of Salvation throughout the ages. Enemies have attempted to destroy the Gospel from outside the church and from within, but You have guided it through the perils of human history to enable more and more people to be saved and be restored in You. May we be committed to the eternal truth of Your Gospel, through Jesus Christ our Lord: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Health

Give thanks to God for the many doctors, nurses and associated professions throughout your own country and the world, who serve people without distinction and for the good of all.

On-going prayers

- *Give glory to God for the seasons; and the sun, rain and the weather*
- *Pray about the issue of 'renewable' energy and its possible benefits*
- *Pray for Iran a country increasingly divided within itself*

Meditation

Listen carefully;

Hear the voice of the Lord, and determine to walk in His ways.

Learn intelligently;

Know what God has required of you; this is a light to your path.

Plan realistically;

Measure yourself against the Gospel, and the path of discipleship.

Work diligently;

Give your all for the Kingdom of God and its fruitfulness on earth.

Evaluate shrewdly;

Seek to discern right from wrong, good from evil, and act accordingly.

Share generously;

For the Lord has told His people to love one another without exception.

And speak boldly;

Preach the Gospel by every means available to you, and be blessed!

Bible Study - 1 John 5:1-5

¹ Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves the child; ² we can know that we love the children of God if we love God and obey His commandments, ³ for the love of God means that we obey His commandments. Now, His commandments are not onerous, ⁴ because whoever is born of God overcomes the world, and the victory that overcomes the world is our faith. ⁵ Who has victory over the world? Surely, the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God!

Review

Throughout his first letter, John writes about two things perhaps above all else; what it means to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and what it means to love one another. Here towards the end of his letter, he writes about the connections between love and faith, and in doing this, he highlights two other themes; being obedient to God's commandments, and being 'victors' in the world.

When it comes understanding 'faith' and 'love', our problem today is this. For sociological reasons, most of us have faith and love compartmentalised in two very different boxes. The word 'belief' comes from a box of abstract thoughts and opinions, and the word 'love' from a box of feelings. As a consequence, most people can talk about faith quite happily without this having an impact on what they do, live or behave, and what we like or who we love is regarded as private, and we mostly respect this in others rather than challenge it.

There are many reasons for this, and much of it is a result of our natural 'existentialism', which is the way people think about things today placing human experience at the centre of life, rather than God.

When John wrote his letter, he did so with a practical connection in mind between faith and love. His letter explains that belief (5:1) and faith (5:4) have direct consequences; indeed, John has already questioned the faith of those who are unable to demonstrate that they love their fellow believers (e.g. 3:17). John says that believing Jesus to be the Son of God is the same as saying 'I love God'; and by the logic of family connections (5:1), loving God and loving others is one and the same thing. It is surely as inconceivable to us as it was to John that anyone could claim to love God, and not do everything possible to demonstrate this in words and loving deeds for others, especially amongst the fellowship of believers. Christian faith can never be a philosophical or religious option, or just a way of life.

At this point, John adds a new thought into his letter, by saying that those who love God should 'obey His commandments' (5:2). Such words might cause some to shudder with fear; did John really reintroduce the idea that people must keep all the commandments in order to prove their love of God? The answer to this is 'No', because John has already maintained that God's commands can be narrowed down to two; firstly to love God because 'He is love' (4:8,16f.), and secondly to 'love one another because He has loved us' (3:23, 4:7f. etc.). These commands are not onerous (5:3) says John, they are a delight. It remains true to this day that if we accept these commandments (and all God's challenges) as a wonderful privilege and not burdensome impositions, we will find that keeping them liberates our lives because by doing so, we remain in His will. Christian life can and should be a joy and not a trial.

Perhaps John sensed the negativity of those who complained at what he wrote, so he explained that to live a life characterised by the love of God and the love of others would be to have victory; a victory over 'the world'! In John's day, the Christian life of practical love was a totally different lifestyle to that lived by most people in the Roman world. No other Roman religion encouraged people to love others; people did what they wanted and worshipped the gods as they wished (rather like today, it seems!) as long as they worshipped the Emperor as well and kept the peace! Against this background of a relatively loveless world, the Gospel message triumphed, for when love was lived and demonstrated in Christian communities it proved irresistible. Of course, the same can be true today if we take John's message to heart and put everything into demonstrating love for one another in Christ.

Our world is not very different today, and wherever it is practised, obedient faith demonstrating love for God and love for others is a revelation to this world. All Christians are called to show their faith through the quality of their love both within the church and beyond; if they are obedient to this call, then they will be victorious in this world! To encourage the churches to which he wrote, John said 'who has victory over the world? Surely the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God'!

Questions (for use in groups)

1. How can we put 'love' into action? Is there any difference between love inspired by God and that which comes from the human heart – or is it all the same?
2. How do we live victorious lives as Christians in the sense of this passage? What does it mean to be an 'overcomer' or a 'victor'?
3. When people today say that they believe in Jesus, what, in general do they mean, and is it the same as we find in this text?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

Our passage places together love, faith, being obedient and living victoriously. This is an open opportunity for preachers to find sermons! It is also an open invitation to Christian people to re-focus their lives on some of the basic truths of their faith. I reckon that if I think carefully, whilst I may be able to tick two or three of these 'boxes' to describe my Christian life now, I am not sure I could tick them all. This is the point of passages such as this; they can help us keep properly focussed on the things of faith; that is, if we read them!

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- Write down these four words, faith, love, obedience and victory, against each day in your diary for the coming week. At the end of a day, see how many of them you can place a tick against. The

exercise seems mechanical, but doing it may help you perceive more in yourself than you would otherwise see, and the Lord can use this to His benefit, and yours.

- *Pray for those who prefer to talk about faith rather than practice it, and those who would rather talk about love than live it. It is a real danger in the world today, and many people find themselves trapped in a world of anticipation rather than participation, and can be deeply frustrated.*

Final Prayer

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