

Prayer

We do not understand how You work, Lord God; or how You are able to do so much for so many within the world. We praise You for Your salvation which is always available, for the countless billions of people for whom you care, and for the control You have over time and the eternal destiny of our world. Bring all things to their conclusion in Your time, we pray, and save all those who have placed their trust in You. Thank you Lord God, AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Television

Pray that the technology of television will be used for good and not for evil, and pray against the many forms of evil that use the television will be brought down in the name of Jesus

On-going prayers

- *Pray for children, and those who teach them about the environment*
- *Give thanks for the rule of law and the security it gives people*
- *Pray for young people in prison and for those who seek to help them*

Meditation

Give me the gifts and graces I need, Lord Jesus,
To be a faithful disciple of Yours. Help me:

- To accept the limits of the life you have given me;
- To refrain from being jealous over the gifts of others;
- To hold my tongue when I am tempted to hurt others;
- To smile when I mean it, and not fake it or avoid it;
- To question my own motives first, before those of others;
- To conquer my anger before it flares and conquers me;
- To give my full attention to others, so they know they are heard;
- To strive to be a peacemaker, a person of mercy and love,

Grant me this prayer so that I may be more like You;
Jesus Christ, my inspiration, my Lord and my God.

Bible Study - 1 John 5:18-21

¹⁸ We know that no one who is born of God continues to sin, for the One who was born of God protects him, and the evil one cannot take hold of him. ¹⁹ We know that we belong to God, and that the whole world lies under the power of the evil one. ²⁰ We also know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. ²¹ Dear children, be on your guard against idols.

Review

As with so much of the letter of 1 John, these words are remarkable and they need to be better known. They sum up a great deal of the classic heritage of our faith and express many truths to which Christians frequently refer, and yet few people would be able to quote them as coming from 1 John. Of course, much of what is said here is found elsewhere in the New Testament, but the urgent and appealing manner of John's speech makes many Christian truths very clear; the Christian is born of God (5:18), the world is under the control of the 'evil one' (5:19), Jesus enables us to understand the truth about God (5:20), and in Him is eternal life (5:20). Then, finally, the last words of John's letter sound like the end of a sermon rather than a letter! Despite all he has said about sin, love, false and true teaching and the works of the evil one, John chooses to summarise and conclude his letter with this single command; 'be on your guard against idols'!

The tone of John's letter is urgent, and the Gospel call is as urgent today as it ever was. Our passage repeats 'we know ...' three times, calling the reader to affirm with John the truth of faith found in Jesus. The

first call, in verse 18 summarises the point John made at the beginning of his letter about abiding in Christ and seeking earnestly to live without sin (1:5-2:6). The point is made perhaps more helpfully than before, because the phrase 'no one who is born of God continues to sin' reflects the real life. We live in a fallen world and find ourselves caught up in sin from time to time, and sometimes we discover that one of our habits is sinful, but once we discover this, we bring it to the Lord so that He will deal with it. We no desire to 'continue' in sin, and we confess our sins because we know Jesus will forgive us and in His strength, the evil one can no longer maintain a hold us (5:18).

The second 'we know ...' found in verse 19 is a statement of fact. There is a basic division between the new life we have found in Christ and the nature of the world in which we live. Our life in Christ is characterised by freedom from sin and its effects (as John describes throughout his letter), whereas the rest of existence is 'under the power of the evil one'. This last phrase is of most interest to us because it is controversial; together with similar references in the Gospels (e.g. John 14:30, Matthew 4:8,9) it says that the whole world is under the domination of 'the evil one' (often called Satan, the enemy, or the devil). Some find it hard to say such a thing about the world; surely, they say, this world is good, not evil? Unfortunately, such well meaning ideas are not in line with either Biblical truth or reality. God has indeed made the world 'good', but it is a 'fallen' world (see Genesis 3). Although God may be found in it, the world is dominated by evil, and this is why we are all subject to sin, and why we all need salvation.

The third 'we know' is found in verse 20. To complete his message and ensure that we have a balanced view of what it means to live in a sinful and fallen world, John re-affirms the basic faith. The source of our 'understanding' of these things and the origin of all truth is God Himself, as revealed through Jesus His Son, and we have eternal life through Him. The verse is longer, but self explanatory, confirming to us that the Christian finds salvation and hope for the future through Jesus alone. There will always be people who find this message incomprehensible or offensive for one reason or another, but for most who hear it, this is the Gospel; it is the good news that God has revealed to the whole world through Jesus.

Now, having studied the final words in John's letter, it seems entirely understandable that he should finish with 'be on your guard against idols'. His message is simple; truck no substitutes for the truth of God found in Jesus. John was right to say this; in his own day he knew of many false teachers, gospels and christs (2:18f.), and there are many more now, some have not changed since the first century and some of them very different. The message of liberation however stays the same. Sin and evil in the world have not changed, and the means of liberation for all people is the same today as it has ever been. Jesus is our saviour because He has died for us to set us free. John's letter says many things, but his last words call on God's people to having nothing to do with any alternatives; there are none.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. How and why do people who are Christians hold on to sins, or have difficulty in dealing with them?
2. Discuss how you feel about what John says in verse 19. What do we see in the world that reminds us that God made it, and what do we see that reminds us that the world is fallen?
3. What substitutes for Jesus are to be found within the world today, and how are Christians tempted to deviate from their faith?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

The conclusion of John's letter seems abrupt. I have wondered whether the letter is based upon a sermon or some other address, in which case the final words have purpose as a climactic 'call' to honour Christ. It certainly does not read like the end of a letter, and even John's other letters (2 John and 3 John) both conclude with greetings, such as 'peace be to you' (3 John v15). However, it is little things like these that make the whole Bible so fascinating, and the fact that it was written so long ago is no reason for us to feel that God's revelation is somehow ancient. The truths that are revealed touch us immediately and with vibrant energy; perhaps not everyone appreciates what is said, but this is God's Word.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Read through this passage and ask yourself whether it reveals anything about Christian faith that is new to you or different from what you have known. If there is some new angle on things, then seek to find someone with whom you can discuss it, and pursue the matter until you feel satisfied that you can understand God's Word.*

- *Pray for those who struggle with faith because it all seems too completed, and the things preachers say or what the Bible says seem to them to be too difficult. Pray that they will be released by God's Word and by Jesus Himself into a love of the things of God, especially the Bible.*

Final Prayer

Dear Lord, drive away from us those spirits of despair that take advantage of our daily troubles and trap us into self pity and gloom. Liberate us by the power of Your Holy Spirit, and may our confidence in Christ be unshakable, each and every day of our lives: AMEN
