

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Your presence makes this day special, for each day spent with You is a day that points to heaven, to glory and eternal life! Move my heart, I pray, to dwell in Your presence during every moment of my life; not so that I do nothing else, but so that Your presence enriches everything I do. This is my heart's deep desire; AMEN.

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Secularism

Pray for those Christian organisations that face pressures to become 'secular' in order to maintain their appeal (e.g. the Y.M.C.A). Pray for Christians who feel marginalised at work.

On-going prayers

- Give thanks for the blessing of life that God has given you
- Pray for the leaders of your country
- Ask God to save us from all irresponsible use of the world He has given us

Meditation

Speak to us with words of prophecy, Lord God,
So we may discern the truth of Your will.

Speak to us with words of trial and challenge;
So we may be tested to our limits.

Speak to us with words of blessing and support;
So we may be empowered for action.

Speak to us with words of wisdom and revelation;
So we may be fed by them, day and night.

Speak to us with words of faith and sound teaching;
So we may accept the Word of God.

Speak to us with words of love and comfort;
So we may have a blessing in a troubled world.

Speak to us with words of power and meaning;
So we may grasp them now, and never let them go.

Bible Study - 1 John 2:7-11

⁷ Dear friends, I am not writing a new commandment for you, but an old commandment you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word you have heard. ⁸ Yet I am writing a new commandment for you that is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is now shining. ⁹ Whoever says, 'I am in the light,' but hates a fellow believer, is still in the darkness. ¹⁰ Whoever loves a fellow believer abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. ¹¹ But whoever hates a fellow believer is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

Review

John continues his letter by speaking directly to his readers about what it means to be a Christian. What he says may appear a little confusing at first, because he says that he is not writing a 'new commandment', but an old one (2:7), but immediately follows this comment by saying 'yet I am writing a new commandment ...' (2:8)! However, when we get to verse 9, the message is clear enough, and we readily agree that someone can hardly claim to live by the light of Christ and still hold hatred towards a fellow believer (2:9)! The passage continues with an encouragement to Christians to live 'in the light' and not in the 'darkness', comparing these two with either 'love' or 'hate' for a fellow believer, and concluding with a hard hitting comment about the blindness of those who continue to walk in the 'darkness' of hating fellow believers (2:11).

Although the last part of this passage has an obvious message, the whole passage needs to be read a few times. Although we might agree with it as we read, what it says is not very clear, and it seems that John relies on a certain amount of assumption. We will have spotted many of these assumptions quite naturally (for example, that light means love), but most of them come directly from John's Gospel. We read there that Jesus is the Light (John 8:12, 9:5), and also that Jesus said 'I give you a new commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you ...' (John 13:34). All this begins to help us understand a little of what John wanted to say here in his letter verses 7 and 8. This great command of Jesus seems to lie underneath everything that John says in the letter, but he only mentions it later on; 'beloved let us love one another ...' (1 John 4:7f.). As we read, everything John writes seems to be against this backdrop, as if everyone knew that this was the one thing John always spoke about; the major theme of his teaching and preaching.

It will now help us to look at what John wrote in his Gospel. When Jesus said 'I give you a new commandment, that you love one another ...' (John 13:34), what He said was remarkable and unique. In the other Gospels, when Jesus was challenged to tell people God's commands, He replied with a standard Jewish answer by quoting two classic Old Testament texts. Firstly, from Deuteronomy 6:5; 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your mind ...' and secondly from Leviticus 19:18 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself' (see Matt 22:36f., Mark 12:28f.). One can imagine that in the early days of the church, people asked John why the 'commandment' he had written in his Gospel was different from what was written in the others!

Verses 7 and 8 may well be part of his standard reply to such questioning. Was it the same as the old commandments mentioned by Matthew and Mark? John gave a 'Yes' and a 'No' answer to this. 'Yes', because the new commandment was based on love just as the old ones were; love of God and love of neighbour (albeit changed into 'love one another just as I have loved you'). These ancient commands came from Leviticus and Deuteronomy, some of the oldest documents of the Jewish Scripture found in the 'Torah' (the Law); so this was a revelation of God they already possessed (2:7). Then, John added a second answer of 'No', because what Jesus said was something alive in them because Jesus was present with His people! The love of God was 'in Him and in you' (2:8); Jesus had given them a new revelation of God's redeeming love (2:8)! The effect of the two verses together therefore says that the love of God is eternal and has never changed; it is just that we see it more completely in Jesus.

The rest of the passage follows on from this. The word 'love' has not been mentioned yet, but you can see that it lies behind everything, so it follows that someone who acts with hatred towards another person in Christian fellowship is in 'darkness', he cannot be in 'light' because Jesus is light, and Jesus is love (2:9)! The other side of this is equally plain, someone who loves all those in Christian fellowship is in complete harmony with Jesus, who loves all His people (2:10). Lastly, those who are caught up in darkness cannot know where they are going because they cannot see (2:11).

We can all draw our own conclusion from what John has said. However, it does not take too much observation to find out that the church today can sometimes be riven with forms of hate, and at every level. All kinds of evil prevent God's people from fulfilling their potential, but we must all watch out for 'lack of love'. John's words are a clear warning to us that we cannot afford to let the darkness of Satan's hatred into our hearts, whatever the provocation.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. In your group, read through this passage and share your immediate reaction to this text. Discuss how they differ.
2. Look up the texts mentioned about the commandments spoken about by Jesus in the different Gospels. What is different about John 13:34?
3. Why do people sometimes end up hating each other within the church, and what can be done about it?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

When reading this passage I reflect on my own years of ministry in which I have all too wrongly assumed that people in a church all love one another, and at least respect one another if they have differences. I have found out to great personal cost that this is normally not true, and it does not take much to discover considerable levels of animosity in some individuals, often quite unexpectedly. Satan has certainly tempted me strongly to let go of 'love for my fellow believer', when faced by certain people and situations, but I have done my best to reject this out of hand. It does require personal effort, and you can't do it if you don't know about it!

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Reflect on the study today and think on the one hand of God's love for you, and on the other hand about those people you find most difficult at church. Do your best to recall that God loves you all equally, and see what He has to say to you!*
- *Pray that those who lead God's people the church will be men and women of love and compassion, so that the ministry of Christ may be exercised amongst us all.*

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, wash away the sins from which we suffer; make us holy, clean, and worthy to be counted as Yours, we pray. Fill us with Your joy and happiness so that no temptation or evil can drag us away from You; make our lives complete in You. Thank You Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord! AMEN