

Wednesday 4th November – I John

Study 6.1 - Free to believe

John tells us that the Spirit gives us confidence in the gospel and in our salvation. But how can we know whether our faith is the real thing?

Truth plus love...

Read I John 4:13-21

Questions

1. *How do we know that we live in God and that he lives in us (v 13)?*
2. *And how do we know that the Spirit lives in us (v 14-21)?*
3. *What does it mean to “rely” on the love of God, do you think (v 16a)?*

It should come as no surprise to us that these are not separate tests, as though we can get some right and others wrong. They are all part and parcel of the same thing. The sign that we have truly been given the Spirit is that we “testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world” (v 14) and that Jesus is God’s Son (v 15). But acknowledging the truth isn’t enough. The truth must also make a difference in our lives. It’s not that we attract God’s love by being loving. Quite the opposite—we love because he first loved us. Our love is the fruit of his love at work in our lives.

Many people pit “spirituality”, “love” and “truth” against one another. Doctrine divides while love unites, some say. Other churches are strong on spirituality but weak on truth, we might say. But such divisions don’t make sense to John. And that’s because his definition of love is the same as his definition of truth. Neither can be real unless they come together, from the indwelling Spirit. This is

the only true “spirituality” that counts.

Apply Questions

1. *Do you ever treat love and truth as alternatives? What about your church?*
2. *How would you push back at a brother or sister who makes a comment that pits these qualities against each other?*

... equals confidence

Re-read I John 4:16-18

Questions

1. *Who might we be fearful of, and why (v 17-18)?*
2. *What link is John drawing between love and this kind of fear (v 18b)?*

Without Christ we would still fear the day of judgment. It would rightly terrify us. But God’s love for us means we can have confidence—confidence that on the day of judgment we will be acquitted. If we are still unsure about the completeness and finality of our forgiveness in Christ, it will compromise our love for God, and our ability to enjoy everything Christ has given to us.

Pray

Are you confident that the day of judgment holds no terror for you—because of Christ?

If so, give thanks and approach his throne with confidence in your prayers.

If not, read I John 1:8-9 again, and ask God’s Spirit to give you reassurance.

Study 6.2- Truth, love and obedience

John seems to be repeating himself—going round and round in circles. But that's the whole point. Truth, love and obedience all lead to each other and all belong together.

A virtuous circle

Read I John 5:1-5

Questions

1. *Try to draw a diagram of how each of the things John mentions leads to the next thing. (Hint: It's a circle!)*

John says that the commands of God are not burdensome (v 3).

2. *What commands is he talking about?*
3. *Why are they not burdensome?*
4. *Why do we feel they can be sometimes?*
5. *Is it God or our faith that has overcome the world (v 4-5)?*

We may struggle with God's command to love others and to speak the gospel to those who are hostile, but neither command is burdensome in the sense of being too big for us or an irrelevant thing to do. God has been victorious over the world and the devil at the cross of Christ. It's a victory we can share in and get a taste of as we put our trust in him. We may feel that our lives are a series of difficult skirmishes and battles that we mostly lose, but the truth is that, in Christ, we are victorious. It's a victory that was won 2,000 years ago at Calvary.

Blood and witnesses **Read I John 5:6-12**

Questions

1. *What might it mean that Jesus came by “water and blood” (v 6)?*
2. *What testimony is there that this is true?*
3. *How does John sum up the stark choice we face, and the promise of the gospel?*

In verse 6 John is most likely talking about the baptism and death of Jesus. We've already seen that some people in John's day were saying Jesus wasn't fully God. They said that Christ, the Son of God, came on the human person Jesus at his baptism and left just before he died. They said the man Jesus was filled with the Spirit of Christ during his ministry, but he wasn't really God. By contrast, John says that Jesus was truly and fully God in baptism and in his death. And what John literally says is that Jesus was the Son “through” water and blood—before, during and after his baptism and death. And so with the Holy Spirit, two establish the truth that Jesus is God. But there's more. These first three witnesses are all the testimony of God towards Christ. But we believe because of the testimony of men (1:1-3; 4:6): the apostolic witness. For us, that means trusting that the Bible gives us an accurate account of that testimony about Jesus: that it is reliable history.

Apply

This is what we have to share with the world: a story from a book about a man who claimed to be God—with excellent and compelling reasons to be taken seriously.

Questions

Are you able to articulate them to a sceptic?

How could you get better?