

Reading: 1 John 4:13-5:1

Theme: Experiencing God's Love.

Sherlock Holmes had a great analytical mind and would note incidental details that others did not and solve the case as he brought all the clues and pieces of evidence together. John has such an approach in the passage we read and he opens up and shows these pieces of evidence. We have seen 1. Received the Holy Spirit (v13); 2. Apostolic Testimony (v14); we looked at the 3rd piece of evidence Personal Acknowledgement of Jesus As God's Son (v15) last week and noted the fact that if we acknowledge, confess that Jesus is the Son of God that God lives in us and we in God and this underlines what we looked at when we looked at the 1st piece of evidence considered in more detail there the mystical union that God establishes through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We will move on and consider the 4th piece of evidence:

4. Confidence in God's Love. (v16-19)

For all of us it is nice to be respected, to be looked up to, to be honoured. It is great to have friends who care for us and are concerned about us. It is brilliant to love someone and treasure them; but it is most wonderful to know that we are loved the same way by that one. Knowing such love occurs in many ways and showing it is important also. John is going to write on our experience of God's love and the subsequent, consequent effects it is to have on our lives. I hoped to cover all these verses in one go but having read much I realised it had to be looked at in more manageable sections and I will only look at the 1st part of v16 today. To help us look at this section we'll be noting 5 things from v16-19 concerning our having Confidence in God's Love.

- A. Experience of God's Love (v16a)
- B. Living in God's Love (v16b)

- C. Confidence in God's Love (v17)
- D. Fearless in God's Love (v18)
- E. Response to God's Love (v19)

A. Experience of God's Love. (v16a)

John has been writing of God's love as it has been shown, known and even that this love needs to be shown by us to other believers as a basis of assuring us it is known personally by ourselves. John was not content to let believers delude, fool themselves that they can have a theoretical love - claim one thing and live indifferent or contrary to it; saying they had a knowledge of such things and yet it not affect their lives, attitudes, words, actions or thoughts or motives one little bit.

John's aim is to move all readers of this letter further on in their Christian lives - to consider their experience of this love. There is a correct interaction between the truth of the apostolic testimony and our lives. These truths are to be known and worked out as living experiences in us and these truths become more real and precious. Is not just being able to quote Bible verses, Bible facts but to know such as real, relevant and really pulsating in our life experience - what is called "experiential knowledge". Let's open up this a bit:

a) The Necessity of Knowledge: we need both the knowledge to believe it is true and to have experienced that in our lives. Sadly, some get it unbalanced and have only an unbalanced academic knowledge and acceptance; while others call for experiences which may or may not be related to the word of God at all. We need both - knowledge and experience worked out from that knowledge. God has revealed Himself in His word. He gives us truth. We can read books that systematise the word of God and we call it doctrine or theology. We are not to be awed by such terms

and ideas as we have the privilege of having had people bundle Bible teaching on certain topics into an organised and concise form to help us understand it better, to see the big picture and how these truths relate to one another. This is to help us live out our lives in the framework of biblical truth as it affects our hearts.

This is the context of what John writes here in v16 - the Holy Spirit has been given, He guided the apostles as eyewitnesses, to declare as eyewitnesses of who Jesus is - the Son sent by the Father to be the Saviour of the world. The same Holy Spirit has taken the factual message and applied it to people's minds, hearts and understandings and they have come to confess, acknowledge that Jesus is God the Son.

Christian belief, faith is based on facts, truths and acceptance of those truths; historically verifiable truths and not on a scheme of unrelated nice warm feelings and mystical experiences. There are absolutes, fixed truths revealed which tell us of God and His love and these are centred on Jesus Christ. Any teaching that ignores, bypasses, minimises or side-lines Jesus Christ as the Son of God, as the only Saviour is not Christian. Any emotional feelings, experiences we have must all be centred, focused on Jesus Christ else we are to suspect them. Any way to God that does not exclusively centre on Jesus is to be jettisoned e.g. doing our best, making ourselves good enough, pardons from men or women, being religious. The Bible tells us there is only one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5).

Here at the start of v16 John draws our attention to knowledge and faith. We have come to know God's character - God is love and knowing it is His unchanging character and so we "rely" (NIV), "believe" (other versions) on the love God has for us. There are definite truths in view as we believe, on which we are to rely. Here

the focus is on the love God has for us - and it directs us to God's character, His essential being as love. Is not on our feelings, on our emotions that can be worked up or confuse us, but facts and statements concerning the evidence of that love e.g. v9-10.

We need to know, experience that love but we need the truth about it to let us know of that love. As we learn of it, so we can believe in the Son of God and experience that love personally. As we experience, know that love personally so we come to rely, believe on God's love for us more and more confidently. The word confidence, boldness comes into John's argument, encouragement and evidence in v17. As we 1st gained knowledge of God being love and all He's done for us so we come to believe - we need to have heard, be told about the great gospel of our glorious God - as faith comes by hearing. See:

b) The Growth of Knowledge: we believe but then our increasing knowledge should cause us to rely, believe more the love of God for and towards us. We may be able to think back and remember when we were learning to swim - the struggle, panic, the splashing and keeping close to the side, keeping our head above water and then came a day when we did a width and we had a growing trust because the things we had been taught were being personally worked out and found to be true in our swimming experience. Here John is saying that our knowledge and belief should give us an ongoing and on growing experience of God's love for us that we recognise is true. He basically says that personally we are to "*taste and see that the Lord is good*"!

We can have and know personally an assurance that God, in Christ, loves us and have underlined in our lives that the Son of God loved us and gave Himself for us. Here at the start of v16 John says "*And so we know*" - but do we? Do we know, rely on

and believe on the love God has for us? It is an important question. We are to know God loves us but it is not just something reserved for the future, with our life now being full of uncertainties, but we are to know that whatever may come or not come our way that God loves us and we are His child. If we know that, then in one sense all else is of secondary importance - still important, still relevant but the chief concern, the matter of 1st importance is dealt with in our own lives personally as our eternal security, safety and well-being rests on it.

It is so important to know the love of God in Christ Jesus and be sure we do. People often say they are uncertain or are not sure they are a Christian or know God's love; yet some say it is presumption and arrogant to say we know God's love, but it is not. Someone here may have one of those feelings, possibly not having an assurance. Can I urge you to look at your life – do you recognise a growing realisation, awareness, recognition that any hope of heaven you may have or aspire to is all centred on the Lord Jesus Christ? The love of God will draw our increasing awareness and attention to the Lord Jesus - not on our feelings, emotions, worth or deserving, but on Him and we will see more and more the wonder of v9 *“This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him.”* If we find our hopes, longings centre on Him alone, we know of God's love for us then we are not ignorant of the love of God and we are to grow in knowledge, belief and of our experience of that love.

As we do so, we will be more and more aware that God is not against us for now there is sense of peace with God and He with us and there will be a loss of cringing fear of God. Martin Luther was terrified of God but when he became a Christian he lost that terrified fear of God and it was replaced with a reverential awe, a

respect of God and love for Him. John will go on to write of this cringing, terrified fear being removed in v18. As we grow in confidence and reliance we come to recognise God really does love us and is truly for us as Paul says in Romans 8:31-32 *“What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all—how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?”* As this works out in our lives we begin to recognise that this God truly does love and care for us and it begins to amaze us, thrill us and humble us.

We recognise, we know we do not deserve such and along with it is coupled to wonder of realising all our sins are forgiven. We may feel it is impossible but at the same time understand it is wonderfully true! We own we do not deserve it - but God has really sent His Son to be our Saviour and all our sins are removed and gone forever. This will strike us with greater force at various times in our lives but is a truth true of all believers.

c) The Thankfulness of Knowledge: as such we have this sense of gratitude and thanksgiving to God *“why O Lord such love to me?”* We cannot understand it, take it in, but we praise and thank God from our hearts and we find a love for God because He loved us. We find it incredible that God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son to die and be our Saviour and we just have to praise Him and say *“How great Thou art”* and we, out of gratitude, would say *“Here am I, send me and use me to do whatever.”*

Because God has so loved us and we know it, we should have an increasing hatred of sin. We want to please Him more for all His love and so we will avoid that which displeases Him. Those who sin lightly, carelessly or can carry on in sin, really have to question

their experience of God. Sin in a believer is such a hurtful thing to our God and Saviour. Yet, if we find we are growing to fear, dislike, even hate sin, then it shows the love of God is effective in our lives as no one can hate sin apart from God working in them. Yet it is not just the negative hating of sin but a positive growing desire to please God John 14:21 *“Whoever has my commands and obeys them, He is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love Him and show myself to Him.”* Our Christian life is not just about doing things but there is to be a desire to know and love God better. Paul could say of his desire Philippians 3:10 *“I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death”* - yes Paul knew Him but he wanted to know Him better and more e.g. courtship and ongoing knowledge in marriage.

But as we get to know Him, know all about Him, there's also a sense where we regret our love to God and Christ - not regret we love Him but regret we love Him at such a low level - as William Cowper wrote *“Lord, it is my chief complaint that my love is weak and faint; yet I love Thee, and adore; O for grace to love Thee more!”* [MP 209 v 6]. It will grieve us that we do not love Him more or as He should be loved, but that in itself is to be an encouragement for unless we knew Him, we could never love Him at all! We couldn't love Him at all if we hadn't already found Him through His grace. Unbelievers are seldom ever concerned that they do not love God as they should, only a believer can hurt in recognising and feeling that.

One tried and tested way to check if we have love for God is that we have a sense of delight, wonder and amazement when you hear the things of God preached by whoever. I own I am not as clear or as fluent or as interesting as I want to be (*or even imagine I am*),

but the truths themselves speak of the One we love and as they are preached we are to delight to hear of them as they remind us of the old, old story of Jesus and His love.

Do we have experience of the love of God made known in the Lord Jesus Christ? Have we believed the Bible, the gospel accounts of the demonstration of that love for ones like us? If so, we have come to know and rely personally on the love God has for us. Knowing that should then thrill us, cause us to desire to know Him and His love the better, cause us to desire to tell of that love and of the altogether lovely one so that others - children, parents, relations, friends, neighbours, colleagues and whoever will come to know Him and His great love too.

My prayer for us all, is as Paul prayed for the Ephesians (3:17b-19) *“I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fulness of God.”*