

# St. Paul's Dorking Small Groups.

February 18<sup>th</sup> 2007

## Living and Loving in Christ

### Word: Key points from Sunday's sermon

To help us make sense of John's 1<sup>st</sup>. letter we need to understand that he was writing to his Christian brothers and sisters who were being subjected to abuse and criticism by former Christians who had joined the Gnostics and created a split in his Church community towards the end of the first century. The Gnostics had torn the Christian community apart with their heresies and no longer showed any love to their former Christian brothers and sisters – quite the opposite sort of behaviour to the one that John calls us as Christians towards...

Chapter 5 of John's letter is a continuation of what he has been saying throughout the letter which is that you cannot separate your love for God from your love of the children of God – your fellow Christians. He is specifically talking about love for each other as. In the first verse John tells us that everyone who believes Jesus is the Christ, is a child of God.

Being and knowing that we are a child of God's is at the core of the relationship that God has with us. We may have mixed experiences of childhood but being a child of God means that we have the ultimate, good and loving parent We can have total security and confidence in the fact that our Father God wants what is best for us. It is only when we have been born again into God's family that we can really know deep down that we are a child of God. It is only when we have this inner knowledge and a sense of "being" with God that we can love one another and obey his commands as John goes on to teach. For many of us at St Paul's there is a sense of God calling us into a deeper reality of what it means to be a child of God. We are being called to prayer, called to enter into a still place of being with God. God is wanting us to discover his total acceptance of us, despite our behaviour or past experiences – to live in the knowledge and freedom of knowing we are loved. Chapter 4 verse 18 – we need have no fear because God's perfect love casts out all fear.

Look ahead to verse 13 John is encouraging us to have confidence! The word that John uses here for confidence is interesting – in the Greek it is *parresia* which meant "freedom of speech". With God we have freedom of speech – he is always listening – more ready to hear than we to pray. We can tell him how we feel knowing he will still love us and will not reject any of His children...we can have confidence in this BUT when we have had our say we say "thy will be done" just as Jesus taught us and just as John says here in verse 14.

Look at verse 2 to 5. There is much talk in the passage of obedience and sin. In verse 4 we read the key to defeating sin is through the victory Christ won for us on the cross. When we live in and though Jesus we too share in this victory over sin. Perhaps you have read this chapter and are worrying that you have sinned too much for God to truly accept you – if you are thinking that then your heart is turned towards God and you are trying not to make a practice of sinning (verse 14). Remember "perfect love casts out all fear" and when we confess our sins and leave them at the foot of the cross we receive God's forgiveness. Verse 20 "and now we are in God because we are in His son Jesus Christ"...

Finally then we look at one of the central themes of John which is to love one another...John begins v. 2 with the statement, "This is how we know", and the object of this knowledge is "that we love the children of God". And how do we know? "By loving God and carrying out his commandments". In John's letter, it is clear that his overriding purposes are to expose the heresy of Gnostic teaching and to emphasize the paramount importance of Christians loving one another. He gives a number of examples of what true love for each other means, for example: "To lay down your life for your Christian brother or sister. " To have compassion for those in need"; and "To love each other with actions and in truth". Loving one another with authentic Christian love is a deep love, a sacrificial love. It is love in action. It's a love expressed in all sorts of relationships across all sorts of ages – for we are all children. It is also about learning to receive...the whole body of Christ or family of God is built up through the interdependence among the members. Finally we can only truly love one another when the love is a natural outpouring and expression of our inner knowledge of God's love. So we end where we began – once we know we are children of God the evidence of that knowledge will be expressed in our desire to follow God's commands and in our love for our fellow brothers and sisters...

### Witness: Questions to discuss

- 1/ How can we discover a deeper heart knowledge and understanding of being a child of God?
- 2/ What effect would having more confidence in God's love for us have on you, the church family and the community?
- 3/ Discuss "how" you relate to God as individuals? Share your experiences of exercising "freedom of speech" in your relationship with God...
- 4/ Loving one another would involve us in being able to "receive" love from others – discuss this point. Is it easier to give than to receive? Interdependence in God's family is key...
- 5/ Spend some time being still with God. Imagine a still, deep pool of water and a pebble being dropped into the centre - the water ripples outwards. Ask God to help you receive His Fatherly love for you His child, just like a pebble...and watch the effects of the ripples...