

1 John 5:19-21 Keep yourselves from idols

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Well, here we are at the end of our study of 1 John, that we began back in November last year.

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1 Timothy 4:13

Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.

This was one of Paul's encouragements to Timothy, that he devote himself to the public reading of scripture.

It's something that we don't see a lot of nowadays - the reading of chunky portions of God's word in public.

In fact the early Christian assemblies would have been doing this very thing often - particularly the letters that were written to individual congregations and the letters that had a broader reach like Ephesians that a number of commentators believe was more of a circular letter - designed to make the rounds through a number of churches.

What these believers must have also felt was the Holy Spirit's inspiration in these writings as they slowly made their way into the canon of scriptures or the bibles we now use.

So with that in mind, what I would like to do this morning as we finish up in 1 John is to have 5 volunteers each come out to the front and read out 1 chapter each of this letter.

In finishing up this morning we are looking at the final 3 verses of 1 John.

1 John 5:19-21

19 We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

20 And we 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 Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

All the way through John's letter he is contrasting those who belong to God and those who are under the influence of the world or belong to the evil one.

The main reason John does this I believe is to leave these Christians - his little children without the shadow of a doubt who they belong to and how much God loves them.

When the pride of the world was puffing up those who “thought” they knew better - both in the assembly and outside of it, John as a shepherd to this flock protected them by strongly resisting these people and he did it by preaching the simple truth that the knowledge of God and an adoption into his family is unearned by anything that we can think or do or ever could do.

You didn't have to work hard at reaching a superior knowledge of God before he would accept you.

You didn't have to beat your body into submission before he was willing to forgive you.

You didn't have to present yourself righteous to God before he was willing to become your righteousness.

No, it was by his sheer grace, mercy and love that while we were still sinners Christ died for us (Rom 5:8).

John calls them lovingly his little children and that's exactly how he wants them to receive Jesus and grow in him, through a child like faith.

Verse 19

We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

One of the points that I feel needs to be made from verse 19 is the phrase that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

On the surface this verse would suggest that Satan is sovereignly in control of the world and that God cannot touch him - that, the world is Satan's jurisdiction and he is running it and God has no part of it.

And as I said last week if we don't take the whole of what scripture has to say on certain topics then we can end up with a warped understanding of God, Satan and ourselves.

So what does it mean that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one?

From a purely logical point of view, by definition if God is God then he knows everything and nothing is out of his control or outside his knowledge.

If, as one theologian has put it,

We do not believe in two ultimate equal powers locked in an eternal struggle for supremacy. If Satan were equal to God, we would have no confidence, no hope of good triumphing over evil. We would be destined to an eternal standoff between two equal and opposing forces.

Satan is a creature. He is evil to be sure, but even his evil is subject to the sovereignty of God, as is our own evil. God's authority is ultimate, his power is omnipotent. He is sovereign.

(R.C.Sproul. Chosen by God. Page 24-25)

From the scriptures we also see the following:

Psalms 24:1-2

1 The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein,

2 for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.

1 Corinthians 10:26

26 For "the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof."

Matthew 28:18

18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

John 17:1-2

1 When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you,

2 since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.

From these verses, and there are many more we see that the earth is the Lord's and everything in it and that Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and on earth by his father.

So, what does it mean that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one?

It simply means that those who don't know Jesus lie in the grip of the deceiving and blinding influence of Satan to the knowledge of the truth.

2 Corinthians 4:4

In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

We know that Jesus said that we are in the world but we are not of the world. He has set us free from sin's slavery and Satan's deception.

After verse 19 comes the following verse right near the end of the letter that brings amazing comfort to us - written around 2,000 years ago it has a relevancy today as though it was written only yesterday and written especially for us.

Verse 20

And we 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.

This verse comforts us by speaking of a number of things:

1. That God has a plan from all eternity and that he is the great initiator of everything.
He was the one who made the first move toward us - in that he sent his Son to us and has caused our eyes to be opened to God.
2. He did this so that we could and would know him who is true - Jesus.
Truth is a commodity that is in short supply in the world today, but in Jesus there is nothing BUT truth and we know him who is true. Lies erode confidence but we can have confidence in him because he will not lie.
3. That our knowledge of Jesus isn't just head knowledge but it is the life time experience of truly knowing him and being IN him.
A union with Jesus where his power, holiness, love, and gentleness transforms our lives, our relationships and affects the world around us
4. And that God himself visited his own planet as one of us with a gift of eternal life for all those who would receive him - and that eternal life is Jesus himself.

If that doesn't bring us comfort then please God give us ears to hear and eyes to see.

And now we come to the final verse

Verse 21

Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

It's as though John is driving the final nail into the coffin of the false teachers and their teaching.

The second commandment warns us against setting up idols in our lives, but it warns against idols that we can essentially craft or make with our hands.

Exodus 20:4

"You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

In the broader sense an idol is anything that takes the place of or assumes more importance or consumes our devotion more - than to Jesus himself.

And in John's letter I believe we can see him going after this idol that the false teachers were setting up. That false understanding about God and in particular who we are to believe Jesus is.

And even today we need to guard ourselves from worshipping ideas about God, even correct ideas about God instead of God himself.

What we believe is vitally important, but we are always prone to wear what we know and what we believe as a badge of honour or our identity of who we are and this is the idol that I believe John warns against.

This in no way should stop us from pursuing Jesus through teaching, study and experience, but we need to always to make sure that Jesus has the preeminent place in our lives.

Let's pray.