

That You Might Know - Eternal Life (1 John 5:1-21)

Introduction:-

It is wonderful in life to receive assurance about different things, whether this be about the past, the present, or the future. How often do we say and hear words to the effect, "Boy, am I glad to hear that, for this news has lifted a great weight off my shoulders!" And as we come to our text today, whereas the end of the Gospel of John declares its purpose as being evangelistic with the words: "But these things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name" (John 20:31), John's purpose at the end of 1 John is more pastoral, in seeking to give assurance to his readers that they truly know God, and have eternal life with the words: "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13). And so whereas belief is the goal of the Gospel of John, here in 1 John it is the starting point for all of those who have put their faith and trust in Jesus as the Son of God. And what these believers need above all else, is the assurance that what they believe in, is true in every respect, and not false. In fact, the kind of news that lifts a great weight off our shoulders! Let us now see how John achieves this goal, and concludes this wonderful letter, both to his original audience, and for us today.

1. First, we are invited to consider "faith" as the key to Victory (verses 1-5)

In this first section, John now focuses on the relationship of the three fundamental elements so important to him in the knowledge of God: faith, love, and obedience. Then in verse 3 John begins his exposition of these three essentials of the faith, by telling us expressly what love for God means. It is expressed by obeying His commands, just as Jesus remained in the Father's love by keeping His commands (John 15:10), and this includes the command to love one another. And if we are tempted to think that this is difficult, John reminds us that His commands are not burdensome, no doubt reflecting Jesus' words at Matthew 11:28-30: "Come to me, all you who are wearied and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." This was so through a greater empowerment to keep Jesus' words through the Spirit, for as John continues in verse 4, "for everyone born of God overcomes the world", on the basis that "he that is within you (the Holy Spirit), is greater than he that is within the world" (1 John 4:4). Also, being born of God, Jesus' followers have a greater desire to follow and please him. Finally in this section, John declares "faith" (only mentioned here in all his writings), as the key to victory. Why should this be so? The answer may be found with the way in which John then aligns this victory of "faith" with the following statement in verse 5, which says: " And who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God, thus providing a frame for the opening belief in verse 1 that Jesus is the Christ (or anointed Messiah). And so by maintaining their faith that Jesus is the Christ, and the Son of God, John's readers will be able to resist the false teaching of the secessionists. And so faith is key, because it establishes right belief and doctrine, then enabling right love and obedience in response to that belief. In this respect, one is reminded of the words of Hebrews 11:6 - "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him, must believe that He exists, and that He rewards those who earnestly seek him." And so for the first time in this epistle, here in this section, John brings together three inescapable qualities of the Christian faith - love, obedience,

and faith. Like the three legs of a stool, all are needed for experiencing the fullness of life that Jesus came to bring. But our faith journey with God can easily be replaced by a strong desire to remain within our comfort zones. John recognized this, and reminded his readers that in reality God's commands are not burdensome. The secret and the means to overcoming the temptation to settle for less are already ours through the Spirit who is within us, who is greater than the one who is in the world, the devil. And the Spirit motivates and empowers us to live to the full for God. And further, each of these qualities, is only made possible by God himself, for according to Ephesians 2:8, faith is the gift of God, lest any man should boast; then according to Romans 5:5, love is not a human achievement, but is a gift poured out from God into our hearts; followed finally by obedience, which according to Ezekiel 36:26-27, and Jeremiah 31:33-34, the indwelling Spirit would enable God's people to accomplish, by enabling us to follow his decrees, and to keep his laws. And so faith, love, and obedience, are not only the test and requirements of true Christianity, as well as its true expression, but by grace, they are also gifts of God.

2. Secondly, we are invited to see a "threefold evidence" as the key to Faith itself (verses 6-12)

In this middle section, we are now presented with a "threefold evidence" as the key to faith itself in the Son of God. Here we also gain a clue as to the nature of the heresy that the false prophets and secessionists were presenting. John begins by saying that Jesus is the "one who came" (as the sent one from Heaven's glory) by water and by blood. But he did not come by water only, at his baptism, which would have suited the viewpoint of the false teachers, who believed that the "Christ" or "anointing" came upon him at his baptism in order to inspire him in his ministry, only to desert him at the cross. But Jesus also came by blood, which refers to his death upon the cross as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. This the false teachers and secessionists could not accept. John then goes on to say that it is the Spirit who testifies to this truth, because the Spirit is truth. Thus there are three that testify, according the principle laid down in Deuteronomy 17:6 and 19:15, that on the basis of two or three witnesses, can a case be established in law. However, scholars ask the question as to how the water and the blood make up the second and third witnesses, unless they become like Jesus' works in John's Gospel, which become silent witnesses to the truth (John 5:36; 10:25). This is quite possible. Further, water and blood appear at the cross itself, when a soldier pierced Jesus' side with a spear at John 19:34. Was John also recalling that event here? (So establishing that Jesus came by water and by blood). But a more compelling line of evidence would take us right back to the witness of John the Baptist himself at John 1:29-34. Here, as Jesus came to John to be baptized, John by divine inspiration and revelation, said, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world", thus anticipating the blood of the cross at the water of Jesus' baptism. Then, John the Baptist gave this further testimony, "I saw the Spirit come down from Heaven as a dove, and remain upon him ... I have seen and testify that this is the Son of God." Thus we find here John the Baptist's threefold witness to the water, blood, and the Spirit's witness upon Jesus, confirming Jesus as the Son of God. This line of evidence would also suit the apostle John's words at verses 9-10 in our passage here, in terms of God's testimony being greater than any human testimony about God's Son. John the Baptist spoke God's words and witness into this situation, revealing Jesus as the Son of God. How much more should we be prepared to listen to and heed this testimony from God. Finally in this section, in verses 11-12, God has given us eternal life as a present possession of believers (recalling John 3:16, 36), and this life is found in His Son. Therefore, whoever has the Son, or

believes in the Son, has life; but whoever does not have the Son, or believes in the Son, does not have life. And the Spirit testifies to this truth, as the Spirit of truth.

3. Thirdly, we are invited to a "new certainty" and "awareness" of God (verses 13-21)

In this final section, John reminds us that we "can be sure" about the matter of eternal life. In fact, the purpose for John's writing of this epistle is found here in verse 13. "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God (Jesus), so that you may know that you have eternal life." John wrote to reassure his readers concerning their possession of eternal life. Do we need a similar reassurance today about our possession of eternal life? One of the best definitions of eternal life is found at John 17:3: "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." It is because eternal life is "knowing the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ as the only true God", that Christians can have absolute confidence in their assurance. Eternal life is a personal encounter with the living God, that is also affirmed through the incarnation of Jesus as the Son of God. And we can know life in the Son of God, as 1 John 5:11-13 points out. However, First John gives us virtually no clues as to what it means to possess eternal life outside of this text. But John gives us a number of clues in the fourth Gospel. To have eternal life means to have one's spiritual hunger and thirst satisfied (John 4:14; 6:35); to be raised up on the last day and to live forever (John 6:40, 51, 54); to have the light of life so that one does not walk in darkness (John 8:12); to have abundant life (John 10:10); to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he sent (John 17:3); and that though we die, yet will we live (John 11:25). Finally, eternal life is received through belief in God's Son at the human level, as texts like John 3:16 point out, but from a divine level, in 1 John, believers have eternal life because they have been "born of God" (1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1,4,18). In the end, eternal life is both a present and future possession, as well as a gift to be employed, especially in our love toward each other within the fellowship. Next, in verses 14-17, John leads us to a confidence that we can have in prayer. Earlier, at 1 John 3:21-22, John linked confidence in prayer with pleasing God by keeping his commands. Here he links it with asking according to God's will. Perhaps both of these areas have a common link, for to pray effectively, believers' requests need to be in accordance with Scripture, concerning what pleases God. Prayer should also lead to life, as we pray for our brothers and sisters who may have committed an observable sin that does not lead to death. But there is a sin that does lead to death, which should not be prayed about. Judaism distinguished between deliberate sins that led to death, and unintentional sins that could be forgiven and atoned for (Numbers 15:22-31). But here, it is most likely, that this sin was the sin committed by the secessionists, who denied that Jesus is the Christ and Son of God who came in the flesh, thus rejecting the significance of His atoning death, disobeying God's commands, and showing no love for true believers, by forsaking the fellowship. Such sin relates to open rebellion, as well as idolatry, which interestingly enough, becomes John's final word to his readers at verse 21. Finally, John concludes this passage with three great certainties at verses 18-20. The first of these, is that those born of God will not continue to sin, for the Son of God so guards and protects us, that the evil one cannot even get a foothold. The second certainty is that we are children of God, in spite of the fact that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. That in itself, should give us cause for great rejoicing. And the third certainty takes the believer to a still higher plane. It relates to understanding, which leads to truth. John says, the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding, so that we may know Him who is true (God the Father). And we are in Him who is true, (either God the Father, or Jesus) by being in His Son,

Jesus Christ. The final words, "He is the true God and eternal life" can refer to either God the Father or Jesus, or both, as at John 17:3, and John 14:6, 9 = "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life", and "He that has seen me, has seen the Father." This then throws light on John's final words at verse 21: "Dear children, keep/guard yourselves from idols", which means false gods, and not just images, for John has just presented his readers with the satisfying assurance that God is true and genuine, and can be trusted, not like the false deities and insubstantial philosophies which clamour for allegiance in the ancient world, including the secessionist false teaching about Christ, which would be tantamount to idolatry. And beside coming to know the true God in increasing measure, the believers have their life in Him for we are also in him who is true, even in His Son, Jesus Christ. It is wonderful to know that we can be confident in our knowledge of God today, in a world where Christian truth and values is in the minority.

Conclusion:-

In his letter, John has sought to give us assurance about the faith in which we stand. His greatest achievement is that he has taken the guesswork out of finding and knowing the true God, because the true God has been revealed in Jesus Christ. And if this is so, then the true God can be trusted, when he brings us the gift of eternal life, through the Cross of Jesus Christ. May we continue to rejoice in these wonderful truths, and in the knowledge that such a God should bring us a greater understanding about himself, and ourselves, and our place within the meaning of life, and within that, the knowledge of God's unsurpassable love and provision for our lives forever. Thanks be to God. Amen.