

A Study through 1 John

INTRODUCTION.

- A. Before we begin our study through 1, 2, and 3 John, it is prudent to consider some background information.
1. Author: The apostle John
 - a. This epistle begins without any declaration of the author's name.
 - b. The author claims to be an eyewitness of the earthly life and teachings of Jesus Christ.
 - c. The author was one of the older generations of Christian leaders who had personal contact with Christ. The author refers to himself as "elder" denoting an older person within this context.
 - d. There is great similarity in language and speech between the gospel of John and the first epistle of John.
 - 1) Consider the similarities between the opening words of both writings.
 - 2) The verbal form of "believe" occurs about a hundred times in John's Gospel. The noun "faith" never appears. In the first epistle, there are nine occurrences of a verbal form of "believe" and just one use of the word "faith."
(ESV Study Bible, Introduction to 1 John)
 - 3) Just as in the gospel of John, the first epistle addresses subjects such as the full humanity and deity of Jesus Christ, the close relationship between believing and obeying God's commands, the importance of love in the life of a believer. Consider the following example

regarding the commonality of Jesus' teaching on love:

- a) John recorded Jesus saying, "*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.*" (John 13:34)
- b) John, in his first epistle writes, "*And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment.*" (1 John 3:23; 2:8-10; cf. 1 John 3:14-18; 2 John 1:5)
- e. Irenaeus, who died A.D. 202, speaks of "John the disciple of the Lord," and writes that John testified in his Epistle, and then quotes from chapter 2, verses 18 and 19.
- f. Most scholars are in agreement as to the apostle John, the son of Zebedee, being the author of these three epistles.

2. Time Period:

- a. It is probable John wrote these epistles sometime after A.D. 95. The general consensus holds the gospel of John to have been written sometime between A.D. 90 – A.D. 95 and the epistles to have been written a short time later.
- b. In various writings, early post-apostolic figures, such as Polycarp and Papias, who lived in the early half of the second century, cite 1 John in their writings indicating his writings were well known before the middle of the second century.

- c. Based upon John's reference to the readers as "my little children" (1 John 2:1) and John's reference to himself as "The elder," it would seem John was much older in life. By tradition, the apostle John was the last apostle to die, dying of natural causes.
3. Issues of the Day:
- a. John, in his three epistles does not name a specific person or false teaching by name. However, based upon external writings, as well as John's own writings, scholars have suggested some probable challenges during John's day.
 - 1) A writer by the name of Irenaeus, who lived in the last quarter of the second century, wrote the following about John: "John, the disciple of the Lord who also had leaned upon his breast, did himself write a gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia." (Iren. Her., III. i. 1, taken from Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol 3, pg 638) It is important to note that Irenaeus testified to a personal acquaintance with Polycarp who had learned the gospel from John and others who were witnesses to the Lord.
 - 2) Ephesus was a very idolatrous city. Idolatry would have been a grave issue challenging Christians.
 - 3) Gnostic propaganda was very strong during the life of John.
 - a) Irenaeus wrote, "John, the disciple of the Lord, preaches this faith, and seeks, by the proclamation of the Gospel, to remove that error which by Cerinthus

had been disseminated among men, and a long time previously by those termed Nicolaitans, who are an offset of that 'knowledge' falsely so called, that he might confound them." (*Iren. Her., III.11.1, taken from Truth Commentaries, 1-3 John, Daniel H King, Sr., pg xvii*)

- b) In commenting on the errors of Nicolaus, Irenaeus wrote, "They lived lives of unrestrained indulgence. The character of these men is very plainly pointed out in the Apocalypse of John as teaching that it is a matter of indifference to practice adultery, and to eat things sacrificed to idols." (*Ibid.*)
- c) It is possible John was preparing the Christians to stand against the teachings of men like Cerinthus. Daniel H. King, Sr, in his commentary on 1-3 John writes the following about Cerinthus: "One of the gnostic teachers active in Ephesus at this time was a man called Cerinthus. A Jew who was educated in Egypt, he sought to combine Old Testament ideas with gnostic philosophy, rejecting all of Paul's letters and accepting only parts of Matthew and Mark from among the NT writings. This higher "knowledge" which he laid claim to did away with the characteristic Christian revelation, centered in the person and work of Jesus,

and grounded in the teachings and writings of the apostles. His was a philosophy of life which had no foundation in the historical facts, such as the birth, physical life, redeeming death, and victorious resurrection of Christ. Rather, it was wed to imaginative, speculative, and philosophical theories about the origin of the universe and its relation to the Supreme Being. Cerinthus contended that the world was created by a lesser God, and that Jesus was born naturally of both Mary and Joseph. He believed that the divine Christ descended upon the man Jesus at his baptism, indwelt him for the duration of his ministry, and left him shortly before his crucifixion. During his ministry Christ proclaimed the unknown Father and performed miracles . . . Thus, these heretical views attacked the essential nature of the person of Christ, especially his incarnation, and indirectly the value of his atonement. They also presented a distinctly different idea of God's revelation to man. The apostles of Christ had little importance in their notion of divine knowledge. Leading proponents of Gnosticism claimed a direct line to God, minimizing the significances of apostolic tradition and witness." (*Truth*

Commentaries, The Three Epistles of John, Daniel H. King, Sr. pg xxii-xxiii)

d) While there are some specifics of Cerinthus' teachings which John did not address, John's first epistles deals strongly with two general teachings of the gnostic teachers of that day.

1) "The first is the exaltation of the human mind, and therefore of the speculative knowledge which it perceives as the product of the *gnosis*, over faith in Jesus Christ and righteous behavior in keeping with the commandments of God." (*Ibid. pg xxiv*)

2) "The second is the conviction that matter is essentially evil because the physical world is the product of an evil power, rather than the "good" creation of God." (*Ibid. pg xxiv*)

B. As we begin our study through the first epistle, consider the following as a general overview description of 1 John: *1 John is a personal letter to Christians which reinforces the Christian's faith in Jesus Christ as the son of God and instructs Christians to walk in the light of Christ and God in all areas of their lives.*

I. CHAPTER 1.

A. John, along with the other apostles, proclaimed the words of life so that others could have fellowship with them and the Lord. (1 John 1:1-4)

1. There are several reasons behind John writing this epistle. We

will briefly outline these reasons now.

- a. As is seen in verse 3, John was writing this epistle so the recipients would have fellowship with John and the remaining apostles and believers.
 - b. John was writing these things so that the joy of the apostles could be complete. (vs 4)
 - c. John was writing this epistle so the brethren would not sin. (vs 2:1)
 - d. John stated six reasons in 2:12-14.
 - e. John was writing this epistle because he knew the recipients knew the truth. (vs 2:21)
 - f. John was writing this epistle to warn the brethren of those who would deceive them. (vs 2:26)
 - g. John was writing this epistle so the brethren would know they have eternal life. (vs 5:13)
2. John was one of many who were eyewitnesses to the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, and therefore bore a certain responsibility. (vs 1-4)
- a. John and the rest of the apostles had been with Jesus since the “beginning” or the beginning of His time teaching on this earth. (vs 1)
 - b. John and the apostles had seen, and bore witness to the eternal life which Jesus Christ taught and made possible. (vs 2)
 - c. The apostle fulfilled their responsibility to declare to the people the teachings of Jesus Christ. By bringing the teachings of Jesus to the people, the apostles showed the people the path to fellowship with the Father and the Son. (vs 3; cf. John 14:25-26; 16:7-11; 16:12-15)
3. Consider a few thoughts regarding John’s use of the word

“fellowship.” Understanding John’s usage of “fellowship” will assist as we progress through this chapter.

- a. The Greek word translated as “fellowship” is *koinōnia*. *Koinōnia* is defined as “1) fellowship, association, community, communion, joint participation, intercourse” (Thayer’s)
- b. Take notice John writes “*you also may have fellowship with us*” and then “*truly our fellowship is with the Father . . .*”
- c. As John will later explain, this fellowship with the Father will depend upon one “*walking in the light.*” We will also see fellowship with fellow Christians being dependent upon one walking in fellowship with God.
- d. Two important points:
 - 1) This fellowship with the Father cannot be separated from one’s fellowship with Jesus Christ. If a person does not accept all of Jesus’ teachings, then that person is not in fellowship with Christ.
 - a) Jesus Christ is the way, truth, and life. (John 14:6)
 - b) The apostles were to teach the new disciples to observe all things Jesus had taught. (Matthew 28:18-20)
 - c) The words of Jesus will judge the person who does not receive the teachings of Jesus. (John 12:48-50)
 - d) If a person is not in fellowship with Christ, then that person cannot be in fellowship with the Father.

- 2) This fellowship is based upon a spiritual commonality, association, or joint participation. Therefore, it is a spiritual fellowship which is manifested in outward or physical ways. Such as . . .
 - a) Worshiping together.
 - b) Studying the Bible together.
 - c) Working with fellow Christians in the work of the local church.
 - d) In short, any interaction of two Christians in the work of the Lord is an outward manifestation of the spiritual bond tying two Christians together in Christ.
- B. Walking in the light results in one walking in fellowship with God. Walking in darkness keeps one from God's fellowship. (1 John 1:5-10)
1. John begins this section by reminding the brethren of a very important message: “*God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.*” (vs 5)
 - a.
 2. The aforementioned principle of no darkness existing in God negates the claims of those who say they are in fellowship with God while they are walking in darkness. (vs 6)
 - a. What does it mean to “walk in darkness”?
 - b. Christians are those whom God has called out of darkness. (1 Peter 2:9-10)
 - c. Christians are to “walk in the light.” (cf. 1 John 1:7; John 8:12)
 - d. There is a stark contrast between walking in darkness and walking in the light. Consider the description as given by the apostle Paul. (Ephesians 5:1-21)

- e. If a Christian is walking in darkness, then any claim of fellowship with God is a false claim, a lie.
3. Walking in the light has two distinct benefits: (vs 7)
- a. Fellowship with fellow faithful Christians.
 - 1) Fellowship with fellow Christians is not based upon a physical relationship. As stated before this fellowship is contingent upon an individual's fellowship with God.
 - 2) If Christian "A" is in fellowship with God and Christian "B" is in fellowship with God, then Christian "A" and Christian "B" are in fellowship together. Their commonality or the common bond is their individual fellowship with God.
 - b. The blood of Jesus "*cleanses us from all sin.*"
 - 1) The Bible says a great deal regarding Jesus' role in cleansing the lost from their sins.
 - a) John the baptizer declared Jesus to be the "*Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.*" (John 1:29)
 - b) The apostle Paul reminded the Christians in Corinth of their being "*washed, . . . sanctified, . . . justified in the name of the Lord Jesus.*" (1 Corinthians 6:11)
 - c) Paul told the saints in Ephesus of the redemption they had through the blood of Jesus Christ as well as the forgiveness of their sins. (Ephesus 1:7)
 - d) The Hebrew writer wrote, "*(H)ow much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered*

Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Hebrews 9:14)

e) Peter referred to *“the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”* (1 Peter 1:19)

2) While the forgiveness of sins is essential to becoming a Christian (cf. Acts 2:38; 3:19), it is necessary that we, as Christians, continue to seek forgiveness *if* we give into sin.

3) John taught that Jesus is our *“Advocate with the Father,”* the *“propitiation for our sins.”* (cf. 1 John 2:1-2)

a) The Greek word translated as “Advocate” is *paraklētos* which means, “1) summoned, called to one’s side, especially called to one’s aid.” (Thayer’s)

b) The Greek word translated as “propitiation” is *hilasmos* which means, “1) an appeasing, propitiating 2) the means of appeasing, a propitiation.” (Thayer’s)

c) As Christians, we are not supposed to sin, we are not to be sinners. However, as John wrote, *“if anyone sins,”* then Jesus Christ continues to serve as our *“Advocate with the Father,”* the *“propitiation (or appeasement) for our sins.”* (cf. 1 John 2:1-2)

4. To deny the existence of the guilt of sin is to deceive one’s self.

(vs 8)

- a. During John's day, there were those who denied the existence of sin, as well as the need for the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ. Such denial is self-deception.
 - b. The Bible clearly shows what is sin and who are condemned under sin.
 - 1) Sin occurs when a person transgresses the law of God. (1 John 3:4)
 - 2) Every person who sins becomes guilty of sin and is separated from God.
 - a) Ex. Israel. (Isaiah 59:2-3, 11-12; Psalms 66:18)
 - b) Spiritual separation (death) spreads to a person when that person sins. (Romans 5:12-19; cf. Romans 6:23)
 - c) The apostle Paul declared the Gentiles and the Jews, as general groups, to be guilty of sin. (Romans 3:23)
 - c. Many people have tried to deny their guilt of sin. However, if a person transgresses the Law of God, then that person is guilty.
 - 1) Denying one's guilt does not remove one's guilt. (cf, Proverbs 20:9; 28:13)
 - 2) Denying one's guilt will not avert the wrath of God. (cf. Hebrews 2:1-4; 12:25)
 - d. Important Point: This verse, within context, does not support the teaching of inherited sin or corrupted flesh. This verse applies to every single case of guilt brought about by sin. (cf. Romans 5:12; Ezekiel 18:19-21)
5. The solution to the guilt of sin is very simple: One must be willing to confess his sin to God. (vs 9)

- a. Confession is much more than reporting a sin. To confess one's sins as stated within this context, the following must be done:
- 1) Acknowledgment of the sinful deed.
 - a) John may have been dealing with a doctrine which taught sin is not real. Therefore a person of enlightened understanding could not be guilty of sin.
 - b) Consider the example of King David who wrote, *"For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me."* (Psalms 51:3)
 - 2) Accept the guilt of the sinful deed.
 - a) It is one thing to admit to doing something. It is another thing to accept the guilt or the consequence of the deed.
 - b) King David wrote of his own sin, *"Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight— That You may be found just when You speak, And blameless when You judge."* (Psalms 51:4)
 - 3) Recognize the endangered condition of one's soul.
 - a) We are filled with unrighteousness. Compare this to the result of confession as seen in the latter part of verse 9: *". . . and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*
 - b) One must believe danger to exist before motivation to turn away is sufficient

enough for change.

- 4) Possess genuine remorse for having committed the sin, sinning against God, and if applicable, against another person.
 - a) The Christians in Corinth is a great example of this truth. (cf. 2 Corinthians 7:9-10)
 - b) King David expressed the genuine remorse which God desired. (Psalms 51:15-17)
- 5) Renounce the sin, repenting of or turning away from the sin.
 - a) Repentance or turning away is crucial to truly overcoming the guilt of one's sin.
 - b) Peter told Simon, "*Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you.*" (Acts 8:22)
 - c) When we confess our sin, we must turn away from the sin, returning to walking in the light. Without such a change, we will continue to walk in darkness.
- b. If we confess our sins, then God is faithful and just to forgive us.
 - 1) God is faithful to fulfill His part of the covenant.
 - 2) He is also just in His decision to forgive us if we confess our sins to Him.
 - a) God is bound by Jesus Christ's atoning blood. (cf. 1 John 2:1-2)
 - b) As we follow His instructions, then He will forgive us of our sins.

- c. The result of our confession is the cleansing of the guilt or stain of sin.
 - 1) When a person becomes a Christian, a child of God, he is “*redeemed . . . with the precious blood of Christ.*” (1 Peter 1:18-19)
 - 2) One who is saved is “*brought near by the blood of Christ.*” (Ephesians 2:13)
 - 3) According to 1 John 1:7, as long as a Christians continues to walk in the light, the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse that person from all sins.
 - 4) Walking in the light demands that “*if anyone sins,*” then that person must confess his sin and ask God to forgive him. (cf. 1 John 2:1,2) If he fails to confess his sin, then God will not extended forgiveness to that person.
- 6. To deny sin, when one is guilty of sin, is to call God a liar. If we deny sin when we are guilty of sin, then God’s word is not in us. (1 John 1:10)
 - a. To deny something upon which God has passed judgment is to deny the truth of God’s word.
 - b. As we will see later in our study, as long as we keep God’s word in us, we will not continue to sin. However, if we stop abiding by His word, then we will walk in sin. (1 John 3:4-9, ESV)
- C. Review of Chapter 1.
 - 1. John, along with the other apostles, proclaimed the words of life so that others could have fellowship with them and the Lord. (1 John 1:1-4)
 - 2. Walking in the light results in one walking in fellowship with God. Walking in darkness keeps one from God's fellowship. (1 John 1:5-10)