

John's First Epistle
Week One
1 John 1-2:8

Day One

¹That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. ²The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us.

1:1 – This epistle starts with no greeting, no author's name and no intended audience. The writer launched right into the purpose for writing, however, and that was to impart what he knew to be true. This tells you that he was therefore addressing something circulating in the churches that was false and untrue. What's more, the writer used the first person plural "we," signifying that he was not alone in what he knew and saw that he was about to write.

The apostle John has been the man whom the early church identified as the author of this letter. It was written late in John's life, when certain errors had crept into the church. The one John seemingly addressed in this letter was the teaching that Jesus had only appeared to be in the flesh. He was not, however, for those teaching this felt that human flesh was so unclean that the Son of God could not maintain His divinity while fellowshiping humanity.

Those who believed this heresy had left the church, satisfied that they saw some truth that their ignorant brethren could not see. **Who better to combat this error than one with the authority of what he had seen by walking with Jesus in the flesh?** John assured the readers in the opening statement that he knew what he was talking about because he had experienced it. You cannot proclaim what you don't know, but can only give witness to what you do know. **How are you proclaiming and sharing the truth that you know? Are you writing, speaking, teaching, or broadcasting using modern media?**

The church must always deal with doctrines of demons (see 1 Timothy 4) and these doctrines are sophisticated and devious. Only the Holy Spirit can protect you from error and keep you in the truth. **Are you walking in the truth? How do you know?**

1:2 – **Who or what is the life that John referenced here?** Why of course it's Jesus! John had seen the real thing and he was writing to assure those who remained true to Jesus that they had made the right decision and that truth was on their side. In other words, John wrote to teach, affirm and encourage. **Can you engage any one of those three activities today? With whom and how?** John was simply repeating Jesus' words when he wrote this, for Jesus said:

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

You don't have to come up with something new to say or teach. You don't have to be sophisticated, fancy or creative. Just tell people who Jesus is and what God has done for you.

Day Two

³We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. ⁴We write this to make our joy complete.

1:3 – John was concerned with the unity of the saints, which was also Jesus' concern, as John had recorded in John 17. **How strong is your fellowship with other believers? Is there room for improvement?**

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3).

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me (John 17:20-23).

1:4 – John derived complete joy from the unity of the saints in one another and in Christ. It is easy to see the connection between this epistle and John's gospel, for already we see similar themes emerging:

“I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete” (John 15:11).

“Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete (John 16:24).

"I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them" (John 17:13).

John did not write to make the readers' joy complete but rather to complete his own joy. He was also urging the readers to enter into his joy because he [John] had the joy of the Lord.

One other word here: I cannot speak for other writers, but I write because I love it. But John was not referring to writing here. He was referring to the joy he received from the thought of a unified church that would be reading his letter. This indicates that John was writing to address a church that lacked unity or that had suffered a schism or split. Paul

had to face this same problem and it has plagued the church throughout history. **Are you walking in unity with your church family?**

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of **unity** among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus (Romans 15:5).

Day Three

⁵This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. ⁷But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

1:5 – John wrote about what he knew. The apostles were not charged with creating new doctrine or their own ministries. Jesus told them to go and teach what He had taught them. That is what we refer to as the apostolic tradition. The Church has the same mandate today, which is to share the gospel of Jesus with the world. There were some among those to whom John wrote who thought they had found another message, a better and improved one, which they believed came from God. John was not impressed and responded with the message that he had heard and seen. That message was that God is light; there are no hidden agendas or secret messages from God written in code. God is light. Since Jesus said He was light, that means that Jesus is God by His own words:

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

1:6 – John taught here that those who did not have fellowship with one another were living in darkness and had no fellowship with the Father and Son. Therefore, they were living in darkness even though they claimed to have light. When someone lives in darkness, they are living a lie. So John was writing to let the saints know that those who had left the doctrine the apostles had imparted were liars and living in darkness! You can see why John had to be the one to write this letter, for only John had the apostolic authority to say such things. He had been with Jesus and been faithful to the gospel for decades, so he could judge whether or not others had been true to that same gospel. Obviously, some had not been faithful but some had.

1:7 – John repeated the importance of fellowship with one another as a means for the believers to be in truth. This fellowship cannot simply be with like-minded people, for the heretics who had gone out of the church's midst had that kind of fellowship. John was referring to those who had fellowship with the doctrine of the light as he and the other apostles had delivered it. That meant that they also had fellowship with Jesus.

When that true gospel is present, then there is light and fellowship and sins are forgiven. That is why you need fellowship, so that you have access to the forgiveness available

only through the blood of Jesus. The effects of that blood are accessible only to those who hold true to the gospel of Jesus and walk with others who are doing the same.

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Are you walking in the light of the gospel's truth? One indication you are is your level and quality of fellowship with other believers, which then confirms and enhances your fellowship with the Lord. When that is secure, then your sins are forgiven. John was drawing a flow chart of sorts: light leads to truth that leads fellowship with one another that leads to fellowship with God that leads to forgiveness of sins. **Are you in the flow of that chart?**

Day Four

⁸If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

1:8 – There have been many individuals and groups through the centuries who have claimed to be sinless. Obviously, this declaration had already begun in the churches to which John was writing. Those heretics not only believed they were sinless but also that they had special spiritual insight and knowledge.

I knew a pastor once who took offense with the words in the Christian hymn, “Lord, my heart is prone to wander, prone to leave the one I love.” Not long after, his son was arrested for embezzlement and fraud. I am not criticizing that pastor, but his idealism did not match reality. We all sin and fall short, not just before we meet the Lord but after as well.

1:9 – In the Old Testament, men were required to present sin offerings on a regular basis to deal with their sinful acts. Today you do not have to make animal sacrifices any longer, but you still must deal with your sinful behavior. That is where the blood of Jesus enters the picture. If you ask God for forgiveness, He will forgive you again and again and again. What's more, His Spirit will work in your life so that your tendency toward sin lessens.

Jesus' sacrifice dealt with sin in your life once and for all. While there are still vestiges of sin, you are the righteousness of God through Christ. **How often do you ask God to forgive your sins? Do you mention those sins for which you need forgiveness? Do you repent, asking God's help in turning your behavior in another direction that is pleasing to Him?**

We see this behavior in Jesus' earthly ministry, for He worked with His disciples and forgave them over and over again. He still behaves in the same way. When you sin, that is not the time to run from God but rather to God. Are you running to Him today? Are you open to your own sinful failures?

1:10 – If someone insists that they have no sin, they then say God is a liar – and that in itself is a sin! The word of God states, “*All* have sinned.” Experience also teaches that sin never leaves, but sensitivity to what is sin and an increasing power of the Spirit enables a believer to live a more holy life. **Are you making progress in your spiritual walk and life? I am not asking whether you are where you would like to be, but are you further along than where you have been?** Remember what Paul wrote

So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin. Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death (Romans 7:21-8:2).

Day Five

¹My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ²He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. ³We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands.

2:1 – John wrote so that the people would not sin by saying that they had not sinned! It is intriguing how often people will deny the truth or not confess something to God, like as if He doesn't already know. If you have messed up, you can admit it. If God were going to “get” you, He would not get you once you are honest. He would “get” you when you did the deed. Honesty with God isn't for His sake, it is for yours. **Are you being honest with God? Is there something you cannot admit to God? Do you see how foolish that is?**

v. 2:2 – Some have interpreted this verse to mean that Christ died for everyone's sins, whether or not they repent. That is not what John was writing. Jesus died for those who turn to God through Him. There is no lack to the sufficiency of Christ for those people who repent. Even if everyone in the world repented of his or her sin, Christ would be sufficient. Not everyone does turn from their sin, however, so Christ is sufficient for only those who are His. Those who are not His have no sacrifice for their sins and live therefore outside of God's grace.

This thinking that all men would be saved is called universalism and has been denounced as error many times. Yet even today some continue to believe that God will grant salvation to everyone, denying the existence of a literal hell and final judgment for sinners. That is not a tenet of orthodox Christianity. All those who call on the name of the Lord will be saved; all those who do not will not be saved. It is as simple as that.

v. 2:3 – There is evidence in the lives of those who know the Lord for salvation and that is in their behavior. Forgiveness of sins isn't just something that God automatically grants to anyone. Forgiveness is granted to those who seek it, by God's grace as a gift. Yet salvation should manifest new deeds consistent with a new heart.

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matthew 3:7-10).

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit" (Matthew 7:17).

Only God knows those who are saved, but a saved person can produce evidence of salvation through his or her works and those certainly give credence to God's presence. **Are you showing forth fruit that is consistent with your confession of faith?** Your works do not save you but you are saved to do good works.

Day Six

⁴The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. ⁵But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: ⁶Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.

2:4 – So if anyone says that he or she has not sinned, that person lies. If anyone says that he or she knows him but does not do what the Lord commands, that person lies as well. John said that sin was a reality but at the same time sin is not the norm for a believer. While sin is rooted in the individual, it should not rule as the believer increasingly yields his or her life to the Spirit.

You should have the picture that John was dealing with lies, which was what the church encountered because it handled the truth. People sounded like they spoke the truth but

they lied. The same thing exists today. There are people who sound truthful and speak about spiritual things with confidence but they lie. **How can you know whether or not someone is lying? Are they speaking truth from the Word? Are they speaking the words of Jesus and is their speech backed up with good deeds? How about you? Is your speech backed up with good deeds? Do you know and are you obeying the words of Jesus?**

John repeated the words that he wrote in his gospel:

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 (John 14:21).

Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me" (John 14:23-24).

"If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love" (John 15:10).

2:5 – The proof of discipleship isn't special knowledge or insight. It is an obedience life. The commands to obey are found in God's word because they are the words of Jesus. **Are you growing the knowledge of God's word?** If so, you should also be growing in your obedience, having more knowledge of what it is that God wants from you.

We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil (Hebrews 5:11-14).

Are you doing the things commensurate with your age and maturity in the Lord? Or are you doing the things of babes even though you are more mature, at least in years with the Lord?

2:6 – John's measuring ruler was simple: If anyone claims to know God and live in Him, then that person will walk as Jesus walked. When you think of it, Jesus left behind a legacy of commands that He walked out in His own life. You also have the words of Jesus as recorded by John:

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in

me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples (John 15:1-8).

Day Seven

⁷Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. ⁸Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining.

2:7 – John indicated that there is no need for any new insight or commands into the things that the apostles had given. He has an old familiar command for the church and that command was relevant then and is relevant now. It was the commandment that was presented in the Old Testament and continued in the New:

"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matthew 22:36-40).

2:8 – Yet Jesus took this age-old command to love your neighbor to a new level when He said

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another (John 13:34).

Jesus modeled a divine love that He then expected His disciples to have for one another. You must search for the concept of love in the Old Testament, but in the New it is the abiding trait of believers.

“By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35).

Are you walking in Old Testament love, which was ritualistic and confined to the covenant community or are you living in New Testament love? John wrote this letter to summarize the gospel and address the schism in the church. John was interested in doctrine but it was a doctrine of Jesus that also led to righteous living, in this case being

love for one another. That was how John summed it up, after having walked with Jesus and then living out the implications of that relationship.

Peter and Paul also saw love as the epitome of Jesus' teaching:

The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Galatians 5:14).

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love (Ephesians 4:2).

live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (Ephesians 5:2).

And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity (Colossians 3:14).

May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you (1 Thessalonians 3:12).

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart (1 Peter 1:22).

As we close this first study, perhaps it is time to evaluate your love. **Are you walking as Jesus walked? Is your knowledge of the truth leading to tangible and evident love for others?**