

1 John

Author: John, the Apostle, one of the “Sons of Thunder” (See Mark 3:17; Luke 9:51-56)

Audience: The Churches of Asia Minor (tradition asserts that after John was released from Patmos, he resided in Ephesus, where he later died; many scholars believe that the gospel was written during this time, as were the letters of John) as the letter has no direct addressee.

Date: Most scholars date this letter after Revelation (AD 95, during the reign of Domitian Caesar), but some date it as early as AD 60-63 (during the early reign of Nero Caesar, but before the deaths of Peter and Paul), as there is no reference to Christian persecution in the letter. (Robinson).

Purpose: This letter is not addressed as many typical letters are. Thus, many scholars believe that this letter is an encyclical, that is, to be read by many churches. The first letter of John seems to be directed primarily against false teaching that was threatening the later church, addressing both Jesus’ reality (vs 1-4) and the role of what real love is in the Church. There seems to be an undercurrent of conflict and tension in the Church as hinted at in the following verses: 2:4, 18-19; 3:6, 17; 4:8, 21; 5:16.

Notes: 1 John 5:7-8 – These verses are different in the KJV versus other translations. They are often the touchstone for individuals sensitive to the reliability of a translation. The evidence from the earliest, oldest manuscripts is that these verses are not present. However, several late Greek and Latin manuscripts (and the King James Version of 1611) include the verses. Many believe they are necessary to support the doctrine of the Trinity, and a Bible that does not include them is heretical.

Outline:

- I. Introduction: The Truth about Jesus (1:1-4)
- II. First Lesson: Fellowship of Believers (1:5-2:11)
- III. Interlude: Reason for Writing (2:12-14)
- IV. Second Lesson: Warning About Deceivers (2:15-27)
- V. Third Lesson: Being a Child of God (2:28-3:15)
- VI. Fourth Lesson: The Lesson of Love (3:16-24)
- VII. Fifth Lesson: A Second Warning About Deceivers (4:1-5)
- VIII. Sixth Lesson: The Second Lesson of Love (4:7-5:5)
- IX. Seventh Lesson: The Testimony of Jesus (5:6-13)
- X. Eighth Lesson: Prayer’s power against the Evil One (5:14-20)
- XI. Closing Signature (5:21)

- I. Introduction: The Truth about Jesus (1:1-4)
 - a. Have you ever tried to describe something, or tell a story where you finished, “you just had to be there”? The person and Presence of Jesus Christ was one of those stories for John. In these first four verses, he establishes both Jesus’ divine bona fides and his physical presence among men.
 - b. How does John establish that Jesus was a real person, and not an invention or fiction to these second or third generation believers?
 - c. How does John describe Jesus’ divine qualities?
 - d. Why is it important for us to connect these two attributes, Jesus’ divinity and His humanity? Is it important that Jesus be both God and Man? How do Christians benefit from this?
 - e. How do these things benefit our fellowship, both with other Christians and with God? How do you understand “our joy may be made complete” in this context?

II. First Lesson: Fellowship of Believers (1:5-2:11)

- a. In 1 John 1:5, John declares that Jesus' message was very simple: God is light and there is no darkness in Him. Where does Jesus teach this? (See James 1:17; John 8:12; 12:35-36) What do light and darkness symbolize here?
- b. 6-7 form the first question and answer, "If we say, 'we have fellowship with him.'" What single fault does John point to to negate this statement? What does "walk in darkness" imply? How is "walking in light" different from this? What benefit do those receive who walk in light? How might this help fellowship?
- c. 8-9 form the second question "If we say, 'we have no sin.'" If a Christian says he has no sin, what must we conclude about that person? What remedy does John recommend? What two qualities of Jesus does John cite here? How are these two qualities applied to the Christian who has sinned?
- d. 10 forms the final question of the chapter, "If we say, 'we don't have any sin.'" How is this question different from the previous one? How is this answer different from the other two? Does this person have any hope? Who is made the liar here? What is the lie?
- e. In the next chapter, vss 1-2 offer all Christians who sin hope through Jesus Christ. How is Jesus the sinner's hope? What offering does Jesus give for the sins of the whole world? When was this offered?
- f. In verse 3, how do we know that we really know Christ? How do you understand, "His commands"? Does he have any specific commands in mind, or does it apply to the whole?
- g. Vss 4-5 offer the first example, the one who says, "I have come to know Him" perhaps a new convert or someone who wishes to become part of the fellowship. What signs does John give us to look for to know his faith is genuine? By what standard are we given here to judge?
- h. Vss 6-8 offer the second example, the one who says "he remains in Him" is to walk just as He walked. Then John reminds us of what important command of Jesus? (John 13:34) How has Jesus proven this command true? How is it proven in our own lives? What impact does this have on the "darkness"?
- i. Vss 9-11 offers the third example, "the one who says he is in the light" is proven false by what? What effect does darkness have on one's sight? So does it matter whether or not you love your brothers and sisters in Christ? How can a person claim to be a Christian and not love his brother? How does that affect his Christian walk?

III. Interlude: Reason for Writing (2:12-14)

- a. John picks up where he left off in vs. 1, saying “I am writing . . .” Note to whom he addresses.
 - i. Little Children (teknon = infant) Who are the “little children” he is writing to? Are these actual little children? And if so, how are their sins already forgiven? (Remember that the forgiveness of sin comes as a result of faith in Jesus Christ) Or are these little children in the faith? (See Hebrews 5:13, where the word used is napios, and 1 Corinthians 3:1,2 same word as Hebrews.)
 - ii. Fathers (pater = father) How might the fathers “come to know” the One from the beginning? Is John referring to 1:1-4? What is the advantage of being a “father” in John’s opinion?
 - iii. Young Men (neaniskos = young man (under 40)) What victory do you think John has in mind here? (see 5:4-5; Revelation 2:7) What is the advantage of being a “young man” in John’s opinion?
- b. John then changes style, saying, “I have written to you . . .” What’s the difference between this and “I am writing”?
 - i. Children (paidion = small child or youth) How is this statement different from knowing the One from the beginning? How would they have known the Father? (See John 14:7-11)
 - ii. Fathers (same as above) Why repeat the same statement twice? Is this a lesson that John’s places special emphasis on? Why?
 - iii. Young Men (same as above) John notes three qualities here: strength, truth, and victory. How are they strong? (Joshua 1:9; Isaiah 40:31) How have they received the Word? (Psalm 119:11; 2 Timothy 3:15) And how does this result in their victory?
- c. So why is John writing this letter? Is he writing to them anything new, or reminding them of something old?

IV. Second Lesson: Warning About Deceivers (2:15-27)

- a. (15-17) John continues his discussion about love with something that Christians are definitely not to love (agapao). How does this contrast with his contention that we ought to love our brothers (vs. 10)?
- b. What things do you think John's prohibition (against sacrificial love) is talking about here?
 - i. The lust of the flesh _____
 - ii. The lust of the eye _____
 - iii. The pride of life _____
- c. How does this affect our love for God (the Father)? How do we know these are not from God? Why are we encouraged to perform God's will, rather than love the world? What would be God's will here?
- d. (18-19) The Antichrist is coming! John is the only NT writer to use this term, and he only uses it in his letters. (1:18, 22, 4:3, 2 J 1:7) As John writes, many people are repeating this statement anticipating a future event, but John doesn't share this opinion. How does John know that it is the "last hour"? Does John know where the antichrists came from? Where?
- e. (20-21) What is the anointing (Gk. "unguent (oily, greasy substance) or smearing") of vs. 20? (see 2 Cor 1:21-22) Who is the Holy One or "the Holy"? How is this connected to "knowledge"? (John 14:25) How do Christians receive the "truth"?
- f. So is John's letter a confirmation of what they already know? Is it a reminder?
- g. (22-23) What is an antichrist? (See 2 John 1:7-9) What is the close connections between Jesus Christ and God? If we deny that Jesus is the revealed Son, what happens to our faith? Is there salvation apart from Jesus Christ?
- h. (24-25) What was it they had heard from the beginning? (Vss 1-4) What is the promise to those who believe? (See John 3:16)
- i. (26-27) John proposes three defenses against those who would deceive Christ's Church. What are they?
 - i. _A_____
 - ii. _T_____
 - iii. _R_____

- V. Third Lesson: Being a Child of God (2:28-3:15)
- a. (28) Why would a Christian be ashamed at the coming of Christ? How closely would you need to “remain in Him” to keep from being ashamed? What keeps you from doing this? How can your brothers and sisters help?
 - b. (29) Is it possible to “do right” apart from Jesus? What do you think he has in mind here? How does being born again help us to do “right”?
 - c. (1) Perhaps a book should be written called, “The Acts of the Love of God”. What “acts” would you include in this book? (See Romans 5:8; John 14:23; John 15:13, 14, etc.) What would you include from this verse?
 - d. In what way does the world not know God/ not know us? (See John 1:10-13)
 - e. (2) Verse 2 reveals the “already, but not yet” dynamic of Christianity. We already know something about who we are, but there remains a mystery of what we will become. What clues lay in this verse about what we are and what we will become? When will be this happen?
 - f. (3) What purpose does this hope serve in the Christian? In you?
 - g. (4-6) How does John define sin? Whose law? In short, why did Jesus come? How was He qualified to deal with our sins? How does this affect the one who remains in Him? (Note: the idea of “does not sin” calls for the condition of actively sinning, or “being a sinner”)
 - h. (7-10) John contrasts the children of God with the children of the Devil. How are they different? How does God help us from sinning? What are the “Devil’s works” and how does Jesus destroy them?
 - i. (11-15) Doing what is right and loving your brother are intimately connected. The two are intertwined, for obedience and love are bound together. (John 15:9-12) To illustrate this, John uses its polar opposite, murder. Murder both disobeys God and demonstrates profound hatred for your brother. Whose example does he cite? What motive does he suggest for him? And what warning does he give about the world in this regard?
 - j. What promise is there for those who love their brothers? What promise is withheld for the murderer? Does this mean one who murders can never have eternal life? What about one who insults their brother, or wishes them dead? (Matthew 5:21-26)

- VI. Fourth Lesson: The Lesson of Love (3:16-24)
- a. John refers to what event in the life of Christ to illustrate what love means? How does this event illustrate love? How does John intend for us to use this illustration in our own lives?
 - b. According to verse 17, how might a Christian demonstrate love for his brother?
 - c. Why does love done in word and speech fall short?
 - d. What is John referring to by “in His presence”? (See 2:28) How will the actions of our love convince our hearts at that point? How would our hearts condemn us? How is the fact that “God is greater than our hearts” intended to be encouraging?
 - e. In verse 21, John suggests that if our hearts do not condemn us (because our actions have proven our love for our brothers), then we can ask whatever we wish from God and we will receive it. Can we ask for anything?
 - f. What two commands does John list in vs. 23?
 - i. _____
 - ii. _____
 - g. How does a Christian remain in Jesus, according to verse 24? What evidence has He given us that He remains in us?

- VII. Fifth Lesson: A Second Warning About Deceivers (4:1-5)
- a. Don't be gullible. Why use "spirit" instead of "teacher"? Does "spirit" carry an authority?
 - b. Why is the Incarnation so important? What does it mean for Jesus Christ to come in the flesh?
 - c. So what is the chief anti-Christian doctrine? How did they know it was coming? Is John saying this Antichrist was already present? (See Matthew 24:24)
 - d. How do God's children already victory?
 - e. Why do false teachers gain such big crowds? If a teacher has a big crowd does that imply he/ she is false?

- VIII. Sixth Lesson: The Second Lesson of Love (4:6-5:5)
- a. How does having God (Spirit of God) help to understand and discriminate teaching?
 - b. True, faithful Christian love comes from what source? How do we know we have this love?
 - c. How important is it to practice love as a Christian? Can one be a Christian without love?
 - d. How do we know God loves us?
 - e. Who loved first? God or man? Why would this be important to point out? How does this show us that the lesson of love is the most important one we have to learn? What does this tell us about ourselves?
 - f. How does God's demonstration of love demand that we love one another? What does God's demonstration tell us about the kind of people we are to love?
 - g. John's statement in vs. 12 seems odd and out of place. Can you think of anyone in Scripture who has seen God? What then does John mean by this statement and how does it fit? (See 3:2)
 - h. John reveals how God remains in us. What is the secret? What is the promise of His presence? How might that affect your life?
 - i. How can we "know" that we remain in Him? (Ephesians 1:13-14 and Galatians 5:22-23)
 - j. John includes his audience in vs. 14 in the testimony. How might we be able to make this testimony to others? How have you seen Jesus be the Savior in your life or someone else's life?
 - k. If someone makes the confession of vs. 15, are they saved? (See Romans 10:9) Or is this more akin to verse 2? How do you make this confession in your life?
 - l. John makes a distinction between knowing God's love and believing God's love. Are there depths to God's love that can't be known, but believed in faith? What promises of God's love do you think fit this category? Do you believe that God's love remains in a person even after they have died?
 - m. John speaks the work of love perfected in us to prepare us for the day of Judgment. What standard does he offer to show us what perfect love looks like?
 - n. John says that fear and perfect love are mutually exclusive. What fear do you think he is talking about? General fear? Fear of others? Fear of judgment?
 - o. How does God motivate us to love?
 - p. Love in a general sense is easy, but when you bring up an actual person, it gets difficult. What does it mean to love your brother? Or hate him? And how does love for my brother prove or disprove my love for God?
 - q. What command is John referring to in vs. 21? (See 2:9-11; 3:10, 17)
 - r. John ties closely together our confession of Jesus Christ and our obedience to Him, especially when it comes to loving God's children, our brothers and sisters in Christ. Why do you think this message would need to be expressed in such strong terms to people who love God?
 - s. How have Christians already conquered the world? What does this mean? In what ways have Christians conquered the world? Is this the dominion of Adam in Genesis 1:27 and the removal of the curse in Genesis 3, or something else?

IX. Seventh Lesson: The Testimony of Jesus (5:6-13)

- a. John speaks of water and blood. To what may he refer to as “water only” and “by water and by blood”? How is this testimony known through the Spirit?
- b. Who else is known as the Truth? Why do you think John includes the Holy Spirit as the Truth? What does this say about God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit? Who is the Holy Spirit and why is He important to the Christian?
- c. Verses 7-8 has an interesting textual history, in that the KJV often includes a significant testimony here about the Holy Trinity (also called the Comma Johanneum, which first appeared in Greek texts in the 12th century), and which more modern translations leave out or include in footnotes. Why do you think this happens?
- d. In what do the Spirit, the water, and the blood agree? How are these three witnesses and what did they witness? (Note John 19:35)
- e. John compares two kinds of testimony, of men and of God. How did the Church rely on these testimonies?
- f. If a person does not believe the testimony of the Son of God, then what does John call him? Why?
- g. Where else have you heard this testimony of vs 11? How does the Son give us eternal life? Have you received this life?
- h. How does a person receive life from the Son of God?
- i. Verse 13 is actually very significant, because John offers assurance, not just hope, of eternal life. How do you think that would help a believer who is struggling?

- X. Eighth Lesson: Prayer's power against the Evil One (5:14-20)
- a. Note again this "confidence" in answered prayer. How do we know what God's will is? (John 6:40; Romans 12:2; Matthew 26:39) What do these verses tell us about His will?
 - b. John makes the connection between God hearing us, and us having what we ask. (See John 14:12-13) What does this say about our prayers?
 - c. John makes a distinction between sins: some bring death and others do not. What kind of death is implied here? In what way does God "give life" to such a person? Why shouldn't we pray for one who commits sin that brings death? Is this an unforgivable sin?
 - d. Vs. 17 seems to describe the difference between mortal and venial sins. How do you understand these differences?
 - e. Ought we to pray for this kind of protection? Who is the "One who is born of God"? Who is "the evil one"? How is one born of God not able to sin? (See John 8:42-44)
 - f. With no surprise, John reveals the game board and its players. What does it mean to be "under the sway"?
 - g. In what way has the son given us understanding? How do you understand the phrase "in Christ"?
- XI. Closing Signature (5:21)
- a. This short verse seems tacked on, but it isn't. What relationship does this have with the previous verses? What is the contrast between the "true God" and "idols"?
 - b. If Christians know who the true God is, how could we ever be fooled by idols? What is the danger they present?