

ΙΩΑΝΝΟΥ Α

Ὁ ἦν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, ὃ ἀκηκόαμεν, ὃ ἐώρακαμεν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ἡμῶν, ὃ ἐθεασάμεθα
καὶ αἱ χεῖρες ἡμῶν ἐψηλάφησαν περὶ τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς – καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἐφανερώθη,
καὶ ἐώρακαμεν καὶ μαρτυροῦμεν καὶ ἀπαγγέλλομεν ὑμῖν τὴν ζωὴν τὴν αἰώνιον ἣ

Surprised By

True

Love

The First Epistle of John

Small Group Bible Studies

Prepared by Dr. Andrew Corbett, Pastor of Legana Christian Church

www.legana.org/studies

*Surprised By
True
Love*

STUDIES IN FIRST JOHN

PRESENTED BY DR. ANDREW CORBIETT

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Studies in First John

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | | |
|---|--|----|
| 1 | Practicing The Truth While Walking | 5 |
| 2 | Perfecting The Love of God | 9 |
| 3 | Laying Down Our Lives In Love | 13 |
| 4 | Believe The Love That God has For Us | 17 |
| 5 | This Is What Happens When You Love God | 23 |



Study 1

PRACTICING THE TRUTH WHILE WALKING

First John 1

First John was probably originally intended for the Church at Ephesus, where the Apostle John was known to have based himself.



Not far from the Church at Ephesus, were the other churches in mentioned in Revelation 2 and 3. John's other Pastoral Epistles (Second and Third John) were probably intended for one of these particular churches. Each of these three Pastoral Epistles have a similar theme - *authentic Christianity strives for righteousness and love*. By the mid to late First Century A.D., a false teaching was beginning to increasingly infiltrate the Church. It was called *Gnosticism*. It taught that a person could be saved in their spirit even though their body lived in sin. It therefore denied that the sinless Christ had come in the flesh. John's Epistles address these issues.

Seen, Heard, and Touched

Some religions claim that certain things happened in history which lend weight to their religious claims. Other religions are entirely based upon certain historical claims. For example, the Book of Mormon is based on certain historical claims including that there was specific ancient civilisation in South America to which Christ apparently appeared. If it can be shown that this history of such a civilisation is false, then Mormonism is false. There is not a shred of archaeological evidence to support any of these claims made by the Book of Mormon.

“The Smithsonian Institution has never used the *Book of Mormon* in any way as a scientific guide. Smithsonian archeologists see no direct connection between the archeology of the New World and the subject matter of the book.”

“Statement Regarding the *Book of Mormon*,” Smithsonian Institution, Spring 1986

This lack of evidence for, and therefore evidence to the contrary regarding, the Book of Mormon is remarkably acknowledged by Mormon Professor Dr. Raymond T. Matheny.

“...No evidence has been found in the new world for a ferrous metallurgical industry dating to pre-Columbian times. And so this is a king-size problem, it seems to me, for so-called *Book of Mormon* archaeology. The evidence is absent.”

Michael Coe, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, Vol. 8, No. 2, Summer 1973, p. 23

Some people deny that there even was a Jesus of Nazareth. If this can be shown to be true, Christian is instantly proved to be false. When John wrote his Epistle around about 63 A.D. there were still thousands of eye-witnesses to the events in and around Jerusalem at the time in which the New Testament claims Christ lived, ministered, performed miracles, was crucified and buried, and rose from dead. If these New Testament claims were false, there could have been tens of thousands of eye-witnesses to publicly deny them.

1. How does First John 1:1-3 give us increased confidence that we have good reasons for believing what the New Testament says about Jesus?

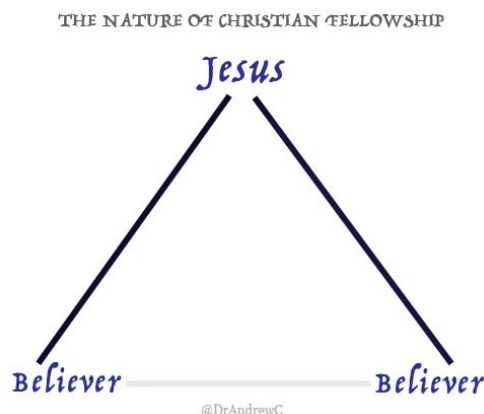
2. Consider First Corinthians 15:6-8. This was written prior to 60 A.D. (a few years before First John). It asserts the same thing that John does in his opening verses. What claims does this passage make and what evidence does it give to support these claims?

What the Apostle John has to say about Jesus is not guess-work or second-hand speculation.

3. In what way do John's claims in First John 1:1-3 disprove the claims of those who were teaching that Jesus was too holy to have had a physical body?

Complete Joy

Christians generally use the word “fellowship” too glibly. Our modern understanding of “Christian fellowship” has reduced its meaning to *time together with another or other believer/s*. But true Christian fellowship is a *triangular*.



4. How then is Christian fellowship different from mere *socialising*?
-
-

The Apostle says that he was writing his Epistle to these believers so that their *joy may be complete*. In order for this to happen he wanted to teach them the truth about the Gospel (1Jn. 1:3). True fellowship can only occur when there is agreement about the truth of Christ's Lordship.

Authentic Christianity

5. What else does John say was necessary for true fellowship between believers? (1Jn. 1:7)
-

6. Salvation from sin makes fellowship with Christ possible. How then can we tell if someone who claims to be a believer in, and follower of, Christ, is telling the truth according to First John 1:6?
-

7. The Gnostics were claiming that a person could sin with their *body* but not with their *spirit*. They would thus be "sinless". How does the Apostle John counter this false idea in First John 1:8, 10?
-

8. How does authentic Christianity begin according to First John 1:9?
-

Let us then walk in the light of God's truth about the true nature of sin and the true identity of the Saviour.

Amen.



Study 2

PERFECTING THE LOVE OF GOD

First John 2

The Churches which the Apostle John was writing to were being infiltrated by the beginnings of a false teaching called *Gnosticism*.

Gnostics believed that matter whether it be the physical universe or the humanly body is evil. It is obvious that there is a great tension between spirit and matter. This effects many of their beliefs and especially the way they perceive the world and God's interactions with it.

<http://www.theopedia.com/gnosticism>

Gnostics believed that sin wasn't about behaviour - it was about being *ignorant* about certain things they claimed.

As long as spirits are trapped in physical bodies and materiality they will be subject to sin which is caused by ignorance of their true nature and home.

Roger E. Olson, "*The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition & Reform*", IVP, 1999

Stumbling And Walking

9. Some preachers have taught that once a person gives their life to Christ, they are given the power to *never* sin again. How does First John 2:1 *not* support this idea that a Christian can live a sinless life?

John wants his readers to know that God's grace is not a licence to sin. God's grace places within the believer a loathing for what breaks God's heart. As we strive to walk with God and keep His commands, there will come moments of weakness where we stumble.

10. Which of these options should a believer do if they yield to temptation and sin? (Note 1Jn 1:9)
- (a) Not go to church the next Sunday because they are not worthy enough.
 - (b) God to church the next Sunday but not participate in Holy Communion.
 - (c) Announce on Facebook that they have failed as a Christian.
 - (d) Confess their sin to God and ask for His forgiveness.
 - (e) Keep committing the sin and hope that no-one finds out.

The Old New Commandment

Truth is powerful and its power is activated when we are *reminded* of it. Consider how often the New Testament charges us to "remember" (Mtt. 16:9; Lk. 17:32; 22:19; Jn. 14:26; 15:20; 16:4; Acts 20:35; 1Cor. 11:25; Eph. 2:11; 2Tim. 2:8; 2Pt. 3:2; Rev. 3:3). It seems that most people at times struggle with their memory but never seem to have the same struggle with their forgettery! This is why regular church attendance is so critically important because it is here that we are *reminded* of the truth and its power is reactivated in our hearts.

11. Since Christ has now come into the world and demonstrated what ultimate love looks like, how should a believer in Christ show love according to First John 2:7-11?

12. What are some tell-tale indicators that a person is not a true believer based on First John 2:11?

I Write To You Because

In any church there will be believers of varying maturities. The Apostle John identifies four levels of Christian maturity.

- (i) **Little children** - recent converts to Christianity
- (ii) **Children** - younger converts who were beginning to understand and share their faith in Christ
- (iii) **Young men** - Christians who were actively witnessing and serving in the church
- (iv) **Fathers** - seasoned and aged believers, who had weathered storms of life and remained faithful to Christ over the long haul of life

To each of these believers at their various stages of Christian maturity the Apostle commends them and reminds them of what Christ had enabled them to experience.

13. At the foundation of the Christian life lies what revelation according to First John 2:12?

14. In what way does the revelation of God as our Heavenly Father make our walk with Christ sweeter and why is this revelation necessary to grow as a Christian? (1John 2:13)

15. In First John 2:13 - 14, “*young men*” are commended for “*overcoming*”. What did they overcome, and how were they able to overcome it, and why is this stage of Christian maturity so important?

The Way Of The World

When the New Testament speaks of *the world* it often means the lifestyle and attitude of ungodliness - *living without reference to, and in rebellion toward, God, His ways, or His Word.*

16. Read First John 2:15-17. In what ways does the world attempt to hinder people from knowing, serving, and enjoying God?
-

17. How then can we guard against such worldliness? (Refer to Romans 12:2, but also give your thoughts on the matter.)
-

The Anointing

John tells his readers that it was “the last hour”. In little under a year from the writing of this Epistle (in AD 64), a massive wave of State-sanctioned persecution and mass martyrdom would commence. Thousands upon thousands of Christians would be brutally murdered by Rome for no other offence than having put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord.



18. Since one of the gifts of the Spirit is teaching, and one of the ministry-gifts of Christ to the Church is the teacher, is John saying that if a Christian has the anointing of the Holy Spirit, they no longer need either? (1Jn. 2:26-27) Discuss.
19. What is the promise that Christ has made to all those who put their trust in Him as their Saviour? How did this change the way we live? (1Jn. 2:25)
-

Amen.



Study 3

LAYING DOWN OUR LIVES IN LOVE

First John 3

Salvation from sin's eternal condemnation is by grace, not our works. Thus, the root of our salvation is God's grace, but the fruit of salvation is grace-enabled good works (refer to Eph. 2:8-10). John is countering the false teaching that since Christians are forgiven by grace it really doesn't matter whether they intentionally continue to practice sinning.

He calls Us His children

20. According First John 3:1, why has God The Father chosen to make us His children?

21. The more we live as God's children by following Him, His ways, His Word and doing His will, the more the world will not understand us. Why? (1Jn. 3:1)

22. God has not finished with us. This transformation will be completed when we leave this life and behold our Saviour in glory. When that happens, what will happen to us? (First John 3:2)

John describes this as one of our *hopes* as children of God (1Jn. 3:3).

23. What do those who have such a hope now do? (1Jn. 3:3; 2Cor. 7:1) How should a believer do this?

Practice Makes Perfect

It may sound like John is saying that if you're a Christian you have to live a sinless life. But we have already seen from chapter 1 that John is not saying this. He is, however, making a distinction between *stumbling* and *practicing*.

24. How would you describe 'practicing' and what is its purpose? Discuss.

25. Why did Christ appear according to First John 3:5 and what does this tell about how He feels about sin?

26. Practice involves a desire to improve. For the believer, while we are told to avoid practicing sinning, what are encouraged to practice instead? (1Jn. 3:7)

27. In First John 3:8, how does John restate the purpose for Christ's coming?

Love In Deed And Truth

Love is the essence of life. Hate is the essence of death.

28. What are the attributes of love described in First Corinthians 13:4-7?

29. What did Jesus equate anger and hatred to in Matthew 5:21-22?

30. Apart from dying for us, in what way did Jesus "lay down His life" for us?

31. How then are we to *lay down our lives* for each other based on this understanding of what Christ did for us? (1Jn. 3:16-17)

32. John implies that being prepared to serve another sacrificially is to have an *open* heart. In First John 3:17 he describes what it would be to have a *closed* heart toward others. How might we then distinguish between what a closed-hearted church and an open-hearted church might be characterised by?

33. In what way is Christian love for others not governed by, restricted to, or based on, feelings alone? (1Jn. 3:18)

When you became a believer, God replaced your heart and its old desires with the seed (1Jn. 3:9) of a new heart and new desires. As we walk with Christ, this seed grows to maturity as it watered by God's Word, radiated by God's love through His people, and exercised through sacrificial service. When this happens the Holy Spirit reassures our hearts that He is at work within us and that we truly are a child of God (1Jn. 3:24).

34. In what way then does this give us confidence that God hears our prayers based on First John 3:22)

Amen.



Study 4

BELIEVE THE LOVE THAT GOD HAS FOR US

First John 4

It seems that John was addressing an error that was beginning to infiltrate these Asia Minor (modern Turkey) churches. It was an early form of Gnosticism (pronounced with a silent “G”). It taught that matter, and especially *human flesh*, was sinful. Thus, these Gnostics were teaching that Jesus was not a real human, but was actually an immaterial but visible emanation from God. While today, our culture may struggle to come to grips with a man *being God*, in the first century, their struggle was not so much with this, but with a God being a man of *flesh and bones*. Throughout this chapter the Apostle gives a number of discernment tests. Watch for his expression, “*By this we know...*”, because what follows is the basis of a discernment test. These tests are in two broad categories: *objective* (facts) and *subjective* (perceptions which are subject to the person who has them). They may also be viewed as *doctrinal* (beliefs), *experiential* (based on forming a relationship with God), and *behavioural* (the fruit of being transformed by Christ).

Whoever Knows God Listens To Us

35. John tells his readers to test any wandering preachers who came their way to determine whether they were preaching the truth (1Jn. 4:1). Today, is it easier or harder for us to also *test* preaching ministries for their truthfulness? Discuss.

The preeminent test for the truthfulness of any preacher, is how they present *Christ*. This is why it is critical for believers to be very familiar with how the Scriptures present Christ as: the eternal Son of God, who was the promised Messiah, born of a virgin, exercised divine prerogatives, suffered and died as the atonement for sins, roses from the dead, and ascended back to heaven, from whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

THE NICENE CREED (325 AD, revised 381 AD)

I believe in one God the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth,
And of all things visible and invisible:
And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God,
Begotten of his Father before all worlds,
God of God, Light of Light,
Very God of very God,
Begotten, not made,
Being of one substance with the Father,
By whom all things were made;
Who for us men, and for our salvation came down from heaven,
And was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary,
And was made man,
And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate.
He suffered and was buried,
And the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures,
And ascended into heaven,
And sitteth on the right hand of the Father.
And he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead:
Whose kingdom shall have no end.
And I believe in the Holy Ghost,
The Lord and giver of life,
Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son,
Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified,
Who spake by the Prophets.
And I believe one Catholick and Apostolick Church.
I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins.
And I look for the Resurrection of the dead,
And the life of the world to come.
Amen.

THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER, 1662, REVISED 1979

36. John says that a test of a preacher's truthfulness is whether they agree with "us"? (1Jn. 4:6) Who might the "us" be? And how might we apply this principle today? Discuss.

His Love Is Perfected In Us

37. According First John 4:7, what is the most obvious fruit of someone who has truly been saved by God?

38. First John 4:8 contains one of the most profound statements about God's character. What is this statement, and when is it the most difficult to accept and why?

39. The crux of the Christian message is stated by John in First John 4:9-10. The Apostle Paul made the same point in Romans 5:8. What is this point and what does it say about God's feelings for you?

40. Based on First John 4:11-12, when is God's love perfected in us?

In this Epistle, John repeatedly takes the reader from theological truth to practical application then onto more theological truth. He also does what every good teacher does. He states then *restates*. All good teachers use *repetition* to deliver a point to their audience, and John does this frequently.

His Love Is Perfected In Us

41. John points to the giving of the Holy Spirit to these believers as proof that they were loved and accepted by God in First John 4:13. What does this tell us about these early believers' experience with the Holy Spirit at this time?

When the early Christians proclaimed Jesus to their Jewish brothers and sisters they often met with opposition. While some may have been prepared to accept Jesus as a good man, not everyone was prepared to accept what these Christians declared about Jesus.

42. Based on First John 4:14-15, what were these early Christians proclaiming to their Jewish colleagues? Why was acceptance of this an indication that someone enjoyed fellowship with God?

Confidence For The Day Of Judgment

As we read through this chapter, we would do well to note the “By this we know” phrases, and observe what the Apostle declares to be the tests of authentic Christianity. These tests involve, doctrine, experience, behaviour.

43. What are these “By this we/you know” type tests which John gives us in First John chapter 4? Categorise them as either doctrine (D), experience (E), or behaviour (B) -

44. According to First John 4:17, why is it eternally important for each of us to be able to pass these tests listed above?

45. How does the knowledge that we have passed these discernment tests for authentic Christianity change the way we live - and the way we will one day die? (Note 1Jn 4:18-20)

Amen.



Study 5

THIS IS WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU LOVE GOD

First John 5

Christian *fellowship* is distinguished from *socialising* in that the both the intention and the result of it is that those involved in *fellowship* come closer to Christ and are equipped to better reflect and represent Him. Christian fellowship is therefore indispensable to Christian growth. If you want to know and love God, the Source of Satisfaction and the means to our Ultimate Fulfilment, then you must be planted in a local church where a community of believers can be your instruments of fellowship.

This Is The Victory

46. What two things must we do, according to First John 5:2, to be instruments of fellowship for another believer in Christ?

47. How can we determine whether we truly love God? (1Jn. 5:3)

(i) _____

(ii) _____

People who misrepresent Christianity often mischaracterise our *faith* as, 'believing something to be true despite the lack of evidence'. Christians do not regard faith in this way. Biblically, *faith* is 'reasonable trust'. That is, we have reasons for trusting Christ as our Saviour.

The believers John had written to were subject to persecution on two fronts. We read throughout the Book of Acts that Christians were fiercely persecuted by Jews. We know that from 64AD, just after this Epistle would have been written, Christians faced brutal persecution from Rome. It was not only becoming difficult to be a Christian in the First Century, it was becoming dangerous and deadly!



48. Consider First John 5:4. At what times in particular do believers especially need to have faith in God?

“Belief” is the substance of trust. To be a *believer* is not just to be someone who considers some things to be true, it is to be *someone who identifies with what they believe*. Therefore, a *believer* is someone who lives faithfully according to what they believe.

49. Who is it who overcomes the world’s temptation and persecution and how do they do it according to First John 5:5?

The authority of the Prophet Moses was founded when he led Israel out of Egypt by the parting of the waters of the Red Sea. The credentials of Moses came by *water*. When the Priesthood was established with Aaron as the first High Priest, his authority was founded in the blood of the sacrificial animals. The credentials of Aaron the High Priest came by *blood*. The Kings of Israel were anointed with oil at their coronation. Anointing oil was a type of the *Holy Spirit*.

50. Jesus was the Ultimate Prophet, Priest and King whom John associates with *water*, *blood*, and the *Spirit* in First John 5:6. Note in what way each of these elements were associated with Jesus and how each bore witness to His identity and authority-

Water (Luke 3:21-22)

Blood (Hebrews 9:12)

Spirit (John 15:26)

John tells us that it was the Father who supplied these testimonies to reveal who His Son really was (1Jn. 5:9-10)

GOD Has Given Us Eternal Life

Eternal life is not merely about the length of time involved - it is about the nature, the quality, the preeminence of this kind of life - *which God enjoys* - where every longing is fulfilled, every desire is obtained, every joy is experienced, and every potential for satisfaction is realised - and He and the Holy Spirit uniquely share with Jesus.

51. Where, according to First John 5:11, can one be assured that after this life they will enter into this eternal life?

52. What is the eternal consequence of not turning to Christ in this life as the Saviour and Lord of our souls? (1John 5:12)

Some people wonder how God could condemn anyone for *eternity* simply for sinning in a *moment* of time. This question displays a gross misunderstanding of the nature of *justice*. Punishment for a crime has nothing to do with the length of time taken to commit the crime. Rather, justice is best served when any punishment is appropriate compared with the nature and gravity of the crime committed. It may only take a few seconds to maliciously take someone's life with a revolver. It was be ludicrous to suggest the appropriate punishment should therefore only be a few minutes!

53. How may someone come to know that they *eternal* life? (1Jn. 5:13)

54. If we truly long for the will of God in our lives, how will this affect our praying, and what does God promise to do when we pray life this? (1Jn. 5:14-15)

The main theme of this Epistle is knowing, enjoying, and sharing the love of God. Rejecting and despising this love is *a sin which leads to death*. May we never do this. Rather, let us truly know, enjoy and share the love of God so that others may be surprised by *true* love.

Amen.

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