

1 John 1 – Chapter Study

INTRODUCTION • JOHN 17

Theme

Of the 4 gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, & John; John is unique and noticeably different from the other three.

Matthew, Mark & Luke are called the “synoptic” gospels because they give a synopsis, a more or less chronological history of the earthly ministry of Christ.

In fact, both Matthew and Mark contain large sections that are virtually identical in wording because they are both written records of the reliable oral teaching that had been designed by the Apostles, Matthew being one of them, and Peter being another, from whom Mark got his Gospel.

Luke also includes a large part of this oral tradition, but supplements it with his reports drawn from interviewing many others who were eye-witnesses of Jesus.

But when John set out to write his gospel – he wanted to fill in some of the gaps that synoptic gospels had left out.

And whereas, Matthew, Mark & Luke had sought to give more of a chronological record of the life and ministry of Jesus, John’s aim was to focus more on the nature and character of Christ.

So he wove his narrative more around particular events and moments in the life of Christ that revealed something about Him not readily seen in the other gospels.

One of the passages which John expands on is the whole scene at the last supper and the words Jesus shared with the disciples as they sat around the table.

After telling them that He was going away, and promising them He would come again to them in the person & presence of the Holy Spirit, just prior to leaving the room for the trip to the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed for them.

We find that prayer in John 17 – please look at it with me

¹Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, ²as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. ³And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

We examined v. 3 just a short while ago and saw that Jesus equates eternal life with the *experiential* knowledge of God.

Eternal life, the life Adam was *originally given* but forfeited through the Fall – the life that Jesus Christ *reclaimed* at the cross and now offers to all those who will put their faith in Him, is to have an *intimate relationship* with God.

That IS eternal life!

And John wrote his gospel to the end that those who read it might believe in Jesus and find that kind of life - John 20:30-31

³⁰And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

1 John was written with this same goal and theme – to *describe* eternal life; to reveal what it *looks like* and to help believers realize that the essence of eternal life is abiding relationship and intimate fellowship with God through an active and vibrant faith in Jesus Christ.

Structure

As we've been studying Paul's and Peter's letters, we've gotten use to a certain form and style of writing that is *logical* and flows from principle to application.

We're in for a bit of a shock if we look for that same structure in 1 John.

You see, John is not interested in laying down a reasoned theological treatise here.

He isn't arguing a point as Peter and Paul do.

John's approach is to simply make an assertion with little to no attempt to prove it.

The reason he doesn't feel compelled to argue his point is because *they aren't his* – they are what he learned from Jesus and as far as John was concerned, that was good enough!

Growing up, when my parents told me to do something, I would occasionally issue a minor challenge – “Why?”

Sometimes my mother or father would tell me why.

But other times, they would simply say – “Because I'm your mother!” Or, “Because I'm your father.”

What John writes about in this letter are truths he had heard from Jesus, and John wasn't about to question them or ask “Why?”

He trusted the Source – *that Jesus said it*, it was enough; for John had come to realize the reality of what Jesus said when He declared – “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life!”

So don't look for John to lay out a logical argument here.

These are true sayings because they come from the Lord.

Also, John doesn't move neatly from one subject to the next.

He returns again and again to the same subjects.

It's almost like he is following the path of a downward spiral.

He'll talk about A, then go to B, and then C.

But then he'll revisit A, this time saying something deeper.

Then he's back to B, and again, taking it deeper.

He goes on to C and does the same thing, then back to A again.

I like the way Tenney describes this letter. He says -

“First John is *symphonic* rather than logical in plan; it is constructed like a piece of music rather than like a brief for a debate. Instead of proceeding step by step in unfolding a subject, as Paul does in Romans, John selects a theme, maintains it throughout the book, and introduces a series of variations, any one of which may be a theme in itself.”

As a result, outlining 1 John has proven to be a bear for those who've tried it.

But if you feel compelled to outline the letter into neat categories, then you might divide it thus:

Chapters 1 & 2 speak of God as *Light*.

Chapters 3 & 4 speak of God as *Love*.

Chapter 5 represents God as *Life*.

But really, the central theme that ties the whole thing together is *relationship*.

The essence of what it means to be human as God created us to be, is to be in *intimate relationship*, first with Him, and then with one another.

Author

There is really no doubt whatsoever that the Apostle John wrote this. ^[1]

Even the most critical of NT scholars recognize and admit this.

The date of the writing is less certain, though it is generally assumed that it was written in about 90 AD, which means John is the last surviving apostle.

Reliable early church tradition tells us that following John's exile on the island prison of Patmos where he received his visions that came to be the Book of Revelation, John was allowed to return

to the mainland where he lived out his days in the City of Ephesus. ^[2]

CHAPTER 1

¹That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—²the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—³that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. ⁴And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.

First off, you'll note that while we call this a letter, it lacks the form of a NT letter we've grown accustomed to.

Paul and Peter begin their letters with a From-To & Greetings section in the first verses.

John jumps right into his subject *without* the customary opening lines of a letter.

In fact, the first verse reminds us of the opening of his gospel, which reminds us of the opening of the book of Genesis and the Scriptures themselves.

He starts *at the beginning* – in this case, the beginning of the revelation of God in the Person of Jesus Christ.

And though John never names himself in this letter, as was his characteristic style to remain unnamed, he does say that he was an eyewitness of the things he writes about.

Even more, he heard and even *handled* the Word of Life.

John loved to refer to Jesus as the *Word*.

He opened his gospel with –

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Then in v. 14 he wrote -

¹⁴And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Here in 1 John, he says much the same thing but in slightly different terms.

In light of John's main theme in 1 John of *relationship*, referring to Jesus as the Word makes perfect sense.

Because the *medium* of relationship is *communication* – this is how fellowship grows and becomes more intimate.

Remember what Jesus said the essence of eternal life was – to know God.

How can we *know* God if He doesn't reveal Himself, and how can He reveal Himself if He doesn't speak?

There are three avenues of revelation God has given us of Himself.

1) the first and most general is Creation.

2) The second is the scriptures - in which men spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

3) Third, and most clearly, as it says in Hebrews 1, God has spoken to us by His own dear Son.

He is, as John says here in v. 1, the *Word of Life*.

He is the One who reveals and communicates life –

The life of the Father, and the life that is eternal because it is in *communion* with the Father.

You and I could sit in each other's presence for many days and just stare at each other.

At the end of that time, we'd know a lot about each other's *appearance*, but we wouldn't really know each other – because there is far more to a person than just the outside.

In fact, the outside, the *appearance* of a person has very little to do with the inside; with who and what they really are.

In order for us to really get to know each other, we will need to spend quite a bit of time communicating – not just talking, but communicating – seeking to speak and listen with the aim of understanding and being understood.

Without this kind of communication, there will be no genuine fellowship between us.
Jesus Christ came to restore the broken relationship between God and man.
The Cross removes the sin barrier and transfers us from death to life.
But that is far from the end of the story.
Now, as the children of God, He wants us to enjoy the benefit of that relationship by entering into fellowship with Him.
This is what we were created for – and fellowship requires communication.
Jesus is the Word of Life – in Him we have God’s revelation to man.
The degree to which we find and enjoy *life* is directly proportional to how intimate our communication and communion with God is.
This is why the Apostle Paul says in Ephesians 5 that marriage is a picture of the relationship between Christ and the Church.
In terms of our relationship with God, we can make it even more intimate than Father and children – for Paul calls the Church the *Bride* of Christ.
In Genesis 2, we see that the goal of marriage is to be one flesh – that means intimacy; to know and be known without any fear of shame or rejection.
A husband and wife know that their intimacy and the enjoyment of their roles as husband and wife is directly relate to how tight and intimately they communicate.
Every married person ought to make the subject of communication a field of the most intense study.
As a husband, I ought to seek to ever more clearly share with my wife what God is showing me about myself and how He is changing me.
My wife ought to do the same.
For the degree to which we know and understand ourselves through the truth and grace of God, and then openly share that with our mate in the commitment of love and acceptance, the more rich and rewarding our marriage will be.
Any barrier we erect to communication, any hardening of our heart and closing of ourselves to our mate is the degree to which we frustrate life and bring death to ourselves and our mate.

This is all a picture of our relationship with God!
And John is concerned with sharing with his readers how they can enter into the full benefits of what it means to be the *children of God*.
It comes through *intimate fellowship* with the Lord, which is possible because Jesus has come as the Word of Life!
He is the revelation of God!

John saw Him and heard Him and even had the chance to touch Him.
We’re reminded of the scene at the last supper when John leaned on Jesus.
This is the kind of intimacy John wants to bequeath to all of us.

In v. 3, John links the fellowship we have with God to having fellowship with one another.

³that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

Because we have fellowship with the Father through the Son, we also, necessarily have fellowship with one another because the Father and Son dwell *in* us!
John is harkening back to Jesus’s words when He prayed in John 17:21

²¹that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.

John is saying here that to be in relationship with God through faith in Christ means to be in a new

relationship with other believers.

And if we are in fellowship with God, then we will also be in fellowship with them!

Friend, we cannot separate these two things – to be a NT Christian means to be a vital part of the Body of Christ!

To be committed to God means to be committed to His people.

To be in fellowship with the Lord means we will be in fellowship with other believers; even more, the level of our intimacy with God is reflected by the level of intimacy we have with other believers-not *all* believers, but those with whom God has called us to be in touch with.

I would ask you to consider Jesus' method of passing on the faith and so, re-infusing the human race with the eternal life Adam lost in the Garden.

He taught the multitudes, but He selected 12 men into whom He poured His life and heart.

And then even from those 12, He singled out 3; Peter, James, and John, with whom He was *most* intimate.

It was not possible for Jesus in His earthly ministry to have the kind of relational intimacy that was necessary to change lives. He had to limit His focus and scope to a smaller group to do this.

So He taught the crowds, but He disciplined and poured his life into just a handful, and then even from the handful focused his efforts on those who would be the core.

You and I come to church here and meet in mass for worship and the study of God's Word.

As we do, there's a certain level of surface fellowship that takes place, but not the kind that makes disciples and sees real life infused into us.

It's only as we meet in smaller groups and pour into each other that that takes place.

Some people do it right here after study – and that's great.

Others are more purposeful and gather in small groups throughout the week and month to develop their relationship with God by deepening their fellowship with one another.

You home group leaders – those groups are not platforms for you to show off your teaching skills.

They are times of fellowship and mutual ministry in which our fellowship with God individually is turned to be a blessing to one another.

You ought to be leading your group to this end.

Note what John says in v. 4 -

⁴And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.

Remember when Jesus said, "I have come that you may have life, and that you may have it MORE abundantly"?

John is echoing that here!

The life Jesus gives is marked by an *unshakeable joy*!

I know that we've covered this ground many times before but let me go over it again for those who are new to the faith.

There's a vast difference between joy and *happiness*.

Happiness is dependent on what *happens*.

When things are going well, I'm happy; when they aren't, I'm sad.

Joy is based, not on what happens, but what happened in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Joy is based on a PERSON, *the* person of Christ.

It's the *settled confidence* of knowing that no matter what happens day to day, when all is said and done, we will be with God in eternal glory and bliss.

Let me use an example of the difference between happiness and joy.

Let's say you're watching a movie you've already seen, so you know the ending.

And in the end, the hero wins and is vindicated; everything turns out great in the end.

But along the way he or she suffers many setbacks and apparent losses.

As you watch the movie, you still feel the sense of loss and pain the hero is going through –

but it's all tempered by the awareness that in the end, it all turns out okay.

We are living a grand story, and it happens that we suffer setbacks and losses from day to day, but the end of our story is certain – we get heaven; we gain glory!

It is this confidence that allows us to endure – even more, that inspires us to trust that the setbacks and sorrows we endure now are actually sharpening our longing for the joy that is set before us!

John says here that he wrote so his readers, and that means you and I, might enter in to all that for which Jesus came.

So let me ask you – is your life FILLED with JOY?

In light of what he's said in the previous verses we realize that joy is the *result* of fellowship with God and one another.

We don't aim our lives at joy – we aim them at God, and find joy throw in.

Many people live their whole lives aimed at being happy.

All their decisions are calculated with the bottom line being more happiness.

They will lie to avoid sorrow, cheat to increase happiness and steal to obtain the happiness they think belongs to someone else.

But happiness is not a worthy object of our lives.

It was never meant to be the goal, so the more people aim at it, the more elusive it becomes.

We were created for God, and our souls are restless until they find their rest in Him.

Joy comes as the overflow of a life in fellowship with God and His own.

⁵This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. ⁶If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

Here's a classic example of how John doesn't argue a point from logic or attempt a debate-form in his letter.

He simply makes an assertion, based on what he's learned from Jesus.

What he learned and is passing on to us is that God is light; meaning He is righteous, holy and pure.

In Him there is no darkness, no evil, no moral short-coming; He's perfect in all His ways and being.

Therefore, if God is *light*, then those who are in *fellowship* with Him will not be in the *darkness*.

If they *are* in darkness, if their *lifestyle* is *marked* by evil and unholiness, then it's proof they aren't in fellowship with God.

That phrase, “walk in darkness” in v. 6 means to order one's lifestyle after that which is contrary to the nature of God.

The word “walk” was a common NT idiom meaning *lifestyle*; one's whole pattern of habitual behavior.

John is *not* saying here that Christians don't sin.

He's saying they don't *habitually* sin the same sins over and over again.

They don't pattern their lives by the world's standards and live in immorality.

They may not be perfect, but they are at least living in the light and *striving* toward perfection.

He will have a lot more to say about this in chapter 2.

⁷But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

We might expect John to say, “If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with Him, for He is in the light,” but that's not the way he puts it.

In John's mind, fellowship with God and fellowship with one another are so closely linked you can't have one without the other; so he condenses the whole thing.

If our relationship with the Lord is healthy and we're walking in tight fellowship with Him, then we

will also have tight fellowship with one another.

And the glue that holds it all together is the blood of Christ which pays our sin-debt and purges us of its stain.

One quick word here before we move on – when you see the phrase “the blood of Christ” or “Jesus” in the Bible, understand that the NT writers did not mean the *literal red liquid* that flowed in Jesus veins, as though it had some kind of *magical* properties.

The *blood of Christ* simply referred to the shedding of His blood in death.

The phrase, “the blood of Christ” is idiomatic or representative of His *death*.

It’s the *death* of Christ, which came about through the shedding of His blood, that provides our atonement.

Now, *what* sin does the blood of Christ cleans us from? Look at it –

But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

And the verb “cleanses” is in the *present indicative tense*, meaning it’s absolutely certain and we don’t have to wait till some future date when we’re doing better or when we *might* be able to be forgiven.

Walking in fellowship with God and one another means that we dwell in the place where we are being *constantly cleansed of our sin*.

But wait a minute, John has just said that if we walk in the darkness, we aren’t in fellowship with God.

He gives us kind of a *paradox* here – one that seems hard to grasp *conceptually*, but one that every child of God who is walking in fellowship with Him understand intuitively!

For the closer we get to the Lord, the more aware of our sin and moral failure we become.

But instead of running from God and rationalizing our sin, we run *to* Him, trusting in His mercy and grace as sufficient to purge us and make us more like Himself.

The person who’s walking in darkness is barely aware of their sin.

Their conscience is so seared, so numb to the conviction of the Holy Spirit, they’ve lost interest in maintaining communion with God.

It’s of that kind of person John goes on to speak -

⁸If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

This is an important point.

The person who is unaware of personal sin and is untroubled by the way he/she falls short of God’s holiness, is on dangerous ground.

Those who are in genuine fellowship with God are intimately aware of their own failure and weakness.

This is one of the reasons why they stay so close to God, because they know if they stray from Him, they’re history!

Every so often you meet people who give you the impression they think they’re perfect.

I’ve noticed that some of these are people who’ve backslidden terribly and when you go to them in an attempt to confront and restore them, they get all huffy and say they haven’t done anything wrong!

They may be living in gross sin, but when you try to reason with them, they have become so blind, they defend themselves and act as if they don’t know what you’re talking about.

The problem is that they are so far from God, they’re judging themselves by the standard of their own desires rather than the holiness of God.

Those who are farthest from God are *least* aware of their sin while those who are closest to Him, paradoxically, are *most* aware of how they come short.

But their vision is so filled with the glory and wonder of the Lord, they are no longer preoccupied

with themselves or their failure.

They're convinced of the mercy and grace of God covering their sin and purging them of it's influence.

⁹If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

We covered v. 9 in great depth on Sunday so I won't deal with it tonight.

¹⁰If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

Here's an example of how John returns to something he's already said but adds more too it.

In v. 8 he said much the same thing, but adds that the person who denies his/her sin is in effect saying God is a liar.

There is no ambiguity about the fact that God has said all people are sinners.

Some may want to deny they are, but that doesn't alter the fact.

All it does is make them guilty of libel against God, and so add to their sin.

Some years ago there was a movement called the Holiness movement.

It's premise was that it was possible to live a life of sinless perfection.

The reasoning went like this:

Can you manage to *stop sinning* for 1 minute?

If you can, why not 2 minutes? After all, that's just 1 minute followed by another!

And if you can go without sinning for 2 minutes, why couldn't you go for 10 minutes, an hour, a day, month, year?

Not a few men and women claimed they had achieved a state of such sinless perfection.

The story is told that at a dinner reception attended by Charles Spurgeon, he was told that one of the men at the main table was one of those who had achieved a state of sinless perfection; at least so he claimed.

Spurgeon, who was quite a prankster, found this absurd and decided to test the man's moral resolve.

So he took a pitcher of water from one of the servers and emptied it into the lap of the man who jumped up cursing obscenities.

Spurgeon's remark was something to the effect of, "Sad how quickly so much moral perfection should be so quickly abandoned over so small an offense."

CONCLUSION

No friends, none of us is without sin.

And the tighter our fellowship with God, the more conscious of our sin we will be.

But as we walk with the Lord in close communion, we have the confidence of knowing that as we admit our failings, His mercy *covers* us and His grace *cleanses* us.

[1]

Our records of early church history show that the first epistle of John was readily received and recognized as John's writing. Polycarp, the disciple of John (*Epistle to the Philippians, chap. 7*), quotes 4:3. Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History*, 3.39) says of Papias, a disciple of John and a friend of Polycarp: "He used testimonies from the First Epistle of John." Irenaeus, according to Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History*, 5.8), often quoted this epistle. So in his work (*Against Heresies*, 3.15.5, 8) Irenaeus quotes from John by name (2:18, etc.); and in 3.16.7, he quotes 4:1-3, 5:1, and 2 John 7, 8. Clement of Alexandria (*Stromata*, 2.66) refers to 5:16. Tertullian in *Against Marcion*, 5.16 refers to 4:1; and in *Against Praxeas*, chapter 15, to 1:1. Cyprian (Epistle 28) quotes 2:3, 4; in *De Oratione Domino* 5 he quotes 2:15-17; in *De Opere and Eleemos*, 1:8; and in *De Bene Patientiae* 2, 2:6. The Muratorian Fragment on the Canon shows acceptance of two of John's epistles (probably the first and second). Origen (according to Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History*, 6.25) spoke of the first epistle as genuine and "probably the second and third, though all do not recognize the latter two." Eusebius (in

Ecclesiastical History, 3.24) said that John's first epistle and Gospel were acknowledged without question by those of his day, as well as by the ancients. So also Jerome in his *Catalogue of Scriptures*.

The similarities between John's Gospel and John's epistles are so remarkable that no one could doubt that all four of these writings were done by the same person. The syntax, vocabulary, and the thematic developments are so strikingly similar that even the inexperienced reader can tell that John's epistles were penned by the writer of the Gospel of John. One reason for this similarity in style is that John probably wrote the epistles shortly after he compiled his Gospel. (The New Commentary)

[2]

The Epistles of John, with Revelation, are the latest of the NT writings. All were written late in the life of the beloved apostle, who survived his companions by some three decades. Irenaeus (c. A.D. 130-200) wrote that "all the presbyters, who associated in Asia with John, the disciple of the Lord, testify that John handed down [these things]. For he remained with them until the times of Trajan [AD. 98-117]. . . . And also the church in Ephesus founded by Paul—John having remained with them until the times of Trajan—is a faithful witness of the tradition of the apostles." (Victor Bible Background Commentary)