

The Epistle of 1 John
Northshore Bible Church
By: Seth Stiles
Summer 2024

Week 1: Introduction

1. Why this study?

- a. **Alignment:** we are a church that loves to teach the Bible, preferably verse by verse. Also, this study will help us accomplish the church mission statement: *NBC exists to make disciples of Christ, who minister to others for Christ, advancing the kingdom of Christ.*
- b. **Clarification:** 1 John is an important book in the New Testament. But, it can be really misunderstood and misapplied if the historical context and purpose of the book is not clearly understood first.
- c. **Application:** 1 John is all about the LOVE WE SHOULD HAVE FOR ONE ANOTHER BECAUSE GOD HAS LOVED US FIRST (4:19). You might say this book is an exposition of the Great Commandment. It will help us flesh out how we can do this in our church family and on the Northshore in 2024. In the process of talking about this, we will also see Christ as the ultimate example and fulfillment of the Great Commandment.

2. Schedule: 8 weeks, 1 hour, Sundays 9-10:00am

- a. 1 – introduction
- b. 2- 1:1 – 2:6
- c. 3- 2:7-27
- d. 4- review and 2:28 – 3:10
- e. 5- 3:11-24
- f. 6- 4:1-20
- g. 7- 5:1-20
- h. 8 – review and closing application/meditation

3. Approach:

- a. Verse by verse.
- b. Teaching and then discussion among class. I really believe discipleship is a community exercise. This is a class but it is not a seminary.
- c. No homework. Occasional recommended readings in the form of a handout.
- d. We will cover theology well, but the focus will be on application. Challenges, struggles, victories, ways to apply living out 1 John in the church family and the outside community, etc.

4. Introduction to the Epistle:

a. Author and Date:

- i. The Apostle John (same author as the gospel of John and likely the book of Revelation¹ too).
- ii. May have been written after he wrote the gospel of John (85-95ad). The gospel of John was written much later than the other three gospels.
- iii. Many scholars believe 1 John was written just a couple years before he wrote the book of Revelation.
- iv. So, 1 John is probably dated somewhere around 90-95ad².
- v. NOTE: John as the beloved Apostle of Jesus – the disciple Jesus had a special love for most. Also, look at the diversity of the writings God spoke to us through him by. A very warm and picturesque account of Jesus that's similar and different than the other gospels. A very practical book in 1 John. Then an apocalyptic book in Revelation.

b. Form:

- i. More of a sermon (homily) than a letter.

c. Theology: various theological issues are addressed in the epistle, such as:

- i. The character of God (seen in his covenant love for us)
- ii. Christ's atonement for our sin and our resulting forgiveness
- iii. Light and dark. God and Satan
- iv. Fellowship (rooted in Gods commitment to His covenant with us)
- v. Righteousness and unrighteousness – being right with God
- vi. Security – we are secure with God now and forever through faith in Christ.
- vii. Sanctification – the inner spiritual life (heart) and Gods working in us to have outward spiritual life (love). There is a balance of truth, obedience and love.

d. Cultural Background and Audience:

¹ Some more liberal scholars will say it's a different John – "John of Patmos". Conservative scholars, and many theologians from church history, believe it's the Apostle John. Why? Writing style is similar to his other writings. Universally accepted criteria for being included in the NT Canon is that the author needs to be an Apostle of Christ or a person close to one (ex. Luke).

² Many scholars believe 2nd and 3rd John are likely the last books of the NT (written after Revelation). James was likely the first (around 45ad). Thus, the writings of the NT span about 50 years.

- i. Audience: 1 John is written to Christians (both Jew and Gentile) that John pastored in likely multiple churches in Asia minor (north of Israel – modern day Turkey). This letter would have been circulated to these multiple churches and others later as well.
- ii. Our Identity:
Christians, particularly Jewish ones, were beginning to be expelled from synagogues by this time³. This could cause a major identity crisis for these Jewish-Christians in three ways: (1) they would fear this would cut them off from the covenant based family of Gods people (fellowship). (2) It could leave them open to being prayed upon by false teachers and (3) it could lead to them to doubting their salvation is secure. Because of this, and the fact that the church is at a strategically important age going into the 2nd century, God saw that things needed to be address. Thus, God used John to write this book.
- iii. Emperor Worship:
The practice of emperor worship was growing stronger and stronger across the Roman empire. Christians worshiped Christ as Lord not Caesar. This was a daily battle in the hearts and physical lives of Christians⁴.
- iv. Docetism and Gnosticism:
The Greek-Roman world was one in which various philosophies and gods were celebrated. Diversity was king. Being late in the first century, false teachers and heresies were already starting to grow and affect the church and the spread of the gospel to the Roman empire. Docetists believed that Christ was divine but only seems to be human. Gnosticism was the belief that there is “special knowledge” God can reveal to people and that only some people would be privileged to receive it⁵. It also believed that material things were evil and only this heightened spiritual knowledge and experience really mattered in life. Thus, whoever has been given this special knowledge, it’s these people who should be listened to. It was

³ Christians, (Jewish and some Gentile ones) were still meeting in synagogues for corporate, Sabbath worship at this time. They were also additionally meeting privately in their homes for an especially “Christian” centered time of worship and fellowship (Acts 2).

⁴ Christ’s Triumphal Entry account is a very clear example of this. By the end of the 1st century, emperor worship was getting even more serious and became a real pastoral difficulty in the church.

⁵ Ironically, Gnosticism is alive and well today in forms like the health, wealth and prosperity gospel!

mystical knowledge/experience of God vs. God's revelation of Himself for us in Christ and the Word of God. By the middle of the 2nd century, this became a fully developed theological system (not a Christian one) that swept through the Roman Empire.

e. Purpose: likely two (pastoral and defensive)

1. Pastoral: To remind and promote fellowship. Through Christ, these Christians have Covenant-based fellowship with God through their salvation in Christ AND they are a new-covenant community with one another (like a Christian form of Judaism). Horizontal and vertical communion/fellowship/unity/identity.
2. Defensive: To defend this truth and argue against false teachers. False teachers were Jewish legalists that claims Christians were abandoning their faithfulness to being Jewish and thus staying connected to God. Also, Gnosticism and Docetism was on the rise and a real threat to the church.

f. Reading and Studying 1 John Today:

- i. 1 John is a book on CONTRAST. John is contrasting, and thus separating, how Christians think and act verses how those who follow false teaching think and act. Christians are in the light and are born again. False teachers and their followers are in the dark and do not know God or live in His ways.
- ii. 1 John is a book of REMINDERS that is meant to fuel PERSERVERENCE. John reminds us of truths about God, our salvation and what our lives should look progressively be looking like as we mature as Christ-followers. These reminders helped the original audience persevere in their faith in a culture that was increasingly antagonistic toward them.
- iii. 1 John is similar to Hebrews and Colossians in describing the supremacy of Christ and the nature of the new covenant. It is also like James is describing that true spiritual maturity is shown by demonstrating faith through true, practical brotherly love.
- iv. Finally, Pastor Jerry says "it's the direction of our life that matters most to God, not the perfection of your life." DO NOT read 1 John as if it is a book about the expectation of PERFECTIONISM on you.

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Week 2: 1 John 1:1 – 2:6

Verses 1-4: An introduction that sounds similar to the gospel of John 1:1-14 and 20:31

v1. – **seen, heard and touched** – the word of life.

- a. An argument/defense of John's authority and witness.
- b. All senses are mentioned. Important for the Greco-Roman world.
- c. The word of life – Jesus as the incarnate logos (truth/wisdom/being) en-fleshed among us. This was a mind-blower for both a Jew and a Greek. *Truth in philosophical form AND God Himself in visible form, walked among us. Not mystical but physical-supernatural.*

V2. – manifest, eternal life

- a. Manifest: seen in full. Able to be known in full. (verses projections, imaginations, superstitions, etc.)
- b. Eternal life: a whole life of well-being and right standing with God – both now and after death. Where true life is found was a big topic in the Greek thinking.

V3. – seen, heard and proclaim again

- a. **Fellowship:** A very important term in 1 John (5x out of 10x total in the NT).
 - a. **OT Background:** "Covenant" – God's promise to be our God and we will be His people. It is the backbone of the Bible. God's covenant with man used 100's of times in the Bible.
 - i. *See handout.* Sinful man's fellowship with God is made possible through God's covenant. Therefore, our fellowship with each other evolves from and is sustained by this.
 - b. **NT Usage:** koinonia. Close knit togetherness based on our common salvation, values, hope and commitments. Setting aside of personal interests. Picture: Spiritual family formed by God. *Purpose: care for one other, worship of the one true God together, and witness to the outside world. VERY IMPORTANT.*

- c. **Function in 1 John:** Rich picture of union with God himself through Christ AND union with one another as adopted sons of God. We are “the new covenant community – new covenant people/family of God”. This is the best community to be a part of. This is the only one that ultimately matter.

V4. **Joy:** (cf. 2 Jn. 12 – one of my favorite verses in the NT)

- a. Well-being, peace, assurance, inner hope that keeps one going.
- b. This is something attractive to all humans, but was especially sought after in the Greco-Roman world.

Verses 1:5-10: Walking in the Light (compared to walking in darkness)

v. 5: God is 100% pure light:

- a. “light” was an important concept in Greek thinking of the first few centuries. It represented enlightenment, truth, self-awareness, purity from an outside source revealed to mankind by higher sources. John uses this term to describe God. He is the perfect manifestation of all these things.

- c. Example: Didache – 150ad. Two Ways to Live.

v. 6: Walk: making a commitment to a habit(s), often increasingly seen to one’s self and others. Integrity in ethical dealings. Gnostics believed they could reach a state of sinlessness.

- b. **HABIT** is a good picture, both intellectually and practically, of the Christian life John is encouraging in this epistle. It is also a good word to describe the contrast of habits of those walking in darkness.

- b. **The “say-walk” relationship to John:** First, a contract between how false teachers talked and walked. Second, a reminder of how Christians should be different. Undergirding this is that since there is only one true God and one true Truth, Christians have the benefit of actually being able to do this consistently (yet imperfectly due to our battle with the flesh, the world and the Devil). Third, ones salvation is questioned if this “new walk” is not seen and you are giving Christianity a bad reputation to the watching world. *Jesus is the ultimate model of the say-walk relationship.*

- c. **Read 1 John 3:9. Great explanation.**

v. 7-8: John says that our covenant connection with God is proved by our consistent (not perfect) walking in the light verses walking in the darkness.

- a. Our relationship with God is rooted in our union with Christ first.
- b. Then, as we are “born again” (John 6), new life grows in us – in thought, word and deed. This, both through our salvation brought to us by God, our commitment to follow Jesus as Lord and the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit, produces new HABITS in us.
- c. Habits, as described above, is another way to understand “walking” in the truth.

v. 9: an important NT verse, sometimes contested. Is it just referring to salvation, or ongoing fellowship with God or both?

- b. Salvation: This is referring to the day you admitted your need of Christ to God and placed your faith in Jesus for your salvation. Forgiveness being the once and for all result. One only needs to do this once. This is true biblically.
- c. Fellowship: We do this in an ongoing way to maintain good fellowship/short accounts with God. This fits with the fellowship theme in 1 John. Verb tense indicates that it is “a repeated acknowledgement of sin”.

v. 10: Self-realization and the character of God:

- a. a true Christian should be no longer self-deluded about their sin.
- b. God (through his Word) would be a liar in that He says people are sinners when they actually are not and therefore do not actually sin. His word clearly tells us this, so if we don’t believe it, we have not truly believed His word.

Verses 2:1-6: Remember, our status with God rests on Christ alone

v. 1: that you may not sin: Walk the walk, your new habits should cause you to sin less and less. Remember, he is writing to Christians who have been saved from sin already through their faith in Christ.

v. 2: If you do sin (showing your walk is not perfect) we have Christ our Advocate (defense attorney): Remember, Christ is our attorney in God’s court. His death grants us a sentence of innocent. This is something God had to do for us through Christ. There is no way we could do this for ourselves.

- a. Propitiation: something done by another to completely cancel out a debt. A covering to appease the wrath of God. Therefore, we are legally sinless in standing with God even though in practice we not sinless.

b. whole world: Debated word usage. (a) refers to Christ died for all the sins of every single person in world history (unlimited atonement). (b) refers to Christ dying for the sins of His elect spread throughout the whole world geographically (limited atonement).

- Good Christians disagree here. Both views are supported scripturally, hermeneutically and historically in the church. Both sides will see each other in heaven.

v. 3-5: How we can know that we “Know him” (know used 3x)

a. Know Him: Intimate fellowship with by covenant. A true follower vs. half-hearted one. The word has the idea that - *the more one lives out his beliefs the more one can be sure that his beliefs are genuine.* (contrast this with the smoke blowing of false teachers). VERY IMPORTANT IN THIS EPISTLE.

b. Keep His commandments: a showing of our belief and love for God in progressively wanting to obey him.

a. Root reference: The Great Commandment

b. General Reference: Christ’s teachings overall. See further 1 Tim. 6:14.

c. Paul: Gal. 6:2 “The Law of Christ” (the true heart of the law lived out as Christ did)

c. One who keeps God’s Word shows the love of God is perfected in this person.

a. God’s love sanctifies the believer.

b. This is not God loves best the person who legalistically obeys His commandments.

Discussion Questions:

1. John’s confidence of the truth of Jesus and the gospel was that he got to hear, see and touch Jesus. Where have you found your confidence in the truth of Jesus and the gospel since you have not been able to have John’s experience?

2. What is a habit (emotional or intellectual or practical) that has changed in you since becoming a Christian or as you have grown in your Christian life?

3. If John came to live in Covington for a month and then came to this class, what are some examples he would give us of what “fellowship with one another” should look like today?

4. How is “close knit togetherness” both attractive and hard to do in our culture?

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John's Point in the Epistle (reflection proposed by Seth): *This is how true spirituality and connection with God works no matter what age or culture you live in. All other ideas are deceptive. Stay on this path.*

Questions begged:

On what evidence or authority should we believe this?

A: 1:1-4 and John's status as an Apostle.

What practically does it look like today?

A: We will address as we journey through this class together.

Week 3: 1 John 2:7-27

2:7-8: Old Commandment – New Commandment

Old – in word only. No person modelled or fulfilled it perfectly.

New – Jesus is God's revelation in the flesh. Made manifest (1:2).

Notice: the key point is the living in fellowship with God as we live out faith out VS just the facts/words of the Law/Word only.

Jesus was philosophy in the flesh and in action so to speak. This was powerful for the audience and a comfort for the believers. Their hope is in a person God has anointed, not just a philosophy.

2:9-11: Who walks in the light and who walks in darkness?

Walks in Light: Who are these people?

A: Those who are "in fellowship" with Him.

- a. In fellowship with: Covenant love, protection, commitment by God through ones faith in Christ as savior and Lord. True saving connection, new birth, adoption, not just being religious.
- b. Then you can walk in the light because you are now directly connected (family connection) to the light – **"Children of God"**. (IMPORTANT TERM IN 1 JOHN- chap. 3)

From Position with God (justification) to Action for God (fruit-sanctification).
Proof = “Loves his brother”.

- We will define biblical love below.
- See further James 2:14-26 – true faith/knowledge is shown/proved through action.

Walks in Darkness (v. 11): who are these people?

A: those who may talk spiritual, but they are not “in Christ” or “in fellowship” with the father through faith in Christ, i.e. false teachers.

No justification, no fruit-sanctification. Proof = “Hates his brother”.

- a. Hate: This word doesn't have the strong emotional sense that it does in English. The word expresses a negative preference, not a strong passion. This verb works more like our ideas of "having an aversion" or "disliking" in English. It means something is valued much less than something else. Strong prejudice.
- b. The opposite of the Great Commandment. Ex. Parable of the Good Samaritan.

This person is blinded, not knowing where he is going. Interesting – they believe they do see and know where they are going. High view of self but self-deceived.

PRIDE produced hate. Hate produces blindness and lostness.

2:12-14: I am writing to you: children, fathers, young men (REMINDER)

The Message translation: ¹²⁻¹³ I remind you, my dear children: Your sins are forgiven in Jesus' name. You veterans were in on the ground floor, and know the One who started all this; you newcomers have won a big victory over the Evil One.

¹³⁻¹⁴ And a second reminder, dear children: You know the Father from personal experience. You veterans know the One who started it all; and you newcomers—such vitality and strength! God's word is so steady in you. Your fellowship with God enables you to gain a victory over the Evil One.

2:15-17: Do not love the world

Love: It's both (a) putting a priority position on something over another and (b) having a deep affection for that priority. Do not give yourself fully over to the priorities and things that the world loves.

- I don't think he means that we can't enjoy some things in the world God has blessed us with.

- This sounds like “don’t make a PRACTICE/HABIT of thinking, acting, loving things like the world does.” “Practice” used 6x in 1 John!

The World: The world's system. Mankind organized in rebellion against God. It's a fundamental level principle at work here. Its values oriented. It's a worldview⁶. It's not just cars, Amazon.com, rap music, etc. Paul's congregation had to fight the temptation to compromise for various reasons.

The “world” is characterized by these three traits:

1. Desires of the flesh: one's disposition(s) that are in opposition of God.
2. Desires of the eyes: Lusts. Covetousness.
3. Pride of possessions: One who boasts to others what he has to elevate himself above others.
4. Why not? Passing away: short lived, has limited value *in an obvious way*.
 - Is. 40:6-8 – the word of the Lord stands forever.
 - Greeks were often in conflict on this issue. (a) they loved fleshly living – eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die. (b) they loved the idea that maybe there was ultimate truths found in the gods.
 - Live for things of eternal value, like God does, now that you are in fellowship with him. You are a child of God.
 - The modern day HWP gospel promotes these things. God wants you to be happy and bless you in this world.

2:18-28: There will continue to be people who love to deceive (antichrists)

What defines an antichrist who deceives others? A: One who denies the Father and the Son. The main way one is guilty of this is these people “deny Christ came in the flesh”.

Jewish: deny the incarnation.

Greek: deny Christ's divinity while being human.

What defines an antichrist today?

A: a false teacher. One who denies or teaches against basic, orthodox beliefs about Christianity. (as defined in places like the Apostles Creed, the clear teachings from the Apostles in the Bible, etc.) Also, one who adds or takes away from the scriptures.

Abide: Make home with, take up residence with. Warm, intimate term. A place of safety and security.

⁶ Worldview: the way in which a person or group of persons view themselves and the world which in turn affects how they act in the world.

- a. John uses this word 10x in his gospel. He uses it 7x more in 1-2-3 John. Obviously, he likes this term a lot – or more specifically, God led him to use this term a lot.

Discussion Questions:

1. In what ways has “walking in the light” been beneficial to your life? In what ways have you been a witness of walking in light to those walking in darkness?
2. The Love-Hate language. What are some reasons why a Christian should not hate (have strong prejudice against)? How can Christians fall into this?
3. Talk about your experiences between the attractions of the world (v.16) and the fact that earthly things pass away (v.17). Temptations? Victories? Failures?
4. In the second half of chapter two, John uses the word “abide” 4x. Though our culture and specific situations are different than John’s, what are some of the cultural battles we have where we can apply John’s commands to us to “abide in Christ”? How does koinonia (vs. just you and Jesus alone) help this?

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Reflection with class time in week 3: Be careful of your assumptions about people. Is it leading you to love them, avoid them or hate them – particularly in the body of Christ.

Week 4: 1 John 3:1-10

V. 1: We are “**Children of God**”

a. Term connected to:

i. **Justification:** Our legal position with God through faith in Christ and His substitutionary death in our place. Hard, fast legal imagery.

ii. **Adoption:** When a child is adopted, he is brought into the full love, security and rights of a family. Warm, relational imagery. Adoption is unearned. It was a great privilege to be able to be adopted in the 1st century.

iii. This would have been a new teaching to the Greeks.

iii. To the Jew it would have been very familiar (Israel as God's child), but this is also new due to the fact that one is truly a child of God not based on ethnic heritage but through faith in Christ now. Abraham was saved/a child of God through faith. But, the NT says that his faith was based on God providing a savior one day – in shadowy form – and his obedience proved his faith.

c. What is this term “child of God” evidence of? **That (the) God is a LOVING God.** Covenant language again here. Agape – perfect, faithful, full, volitional toward us – his image bearers.

V.2: We shall be like Him – because we will see him as he is.

a. We will reflect his glory due to His redeeming work in our soul and life.

b. After Jesus' second coming, Christians will see him – not by faith anymore. Final transformation and confirmation will occur.

c. SALVATION in the Bible: Justification (status “are saved”), Sanctification (new living is proof of status “being saved”), Glorification (perfected and no more sin “finally saved”). All three are the full image of the term. NOTE: Justification is our entry gate into heaven.

d. V. 3 says this is part of our hope

i. we will one day see him and be like him. Hope carries us through this world.

ii. We purify ourselves – our righteousness living, fueled by our new life in Christ, is evidence of pure faith from within. (Vs. the lack of this evidence in false teachers).

V. 4: **“Practice”** – 5x in 1 John. **Habitual actions connected to the true self, outworking of ones values or thinking.** Remember – John is contrasting what walking in the light vs. walking in the darkness looks like.

Lawlessness: forceful tense = the utter disregard for God's law. General sense = It means the condition of one without law which can be due to ignorance or by deliberate and intentional acts. It may be connected to one's core operating system, connected to one's heart condition.

V. 5: Key attribute to Jesus: **Sinless.**

a. **Why is Jesus being sinless important?**

i. Theological: _____

ii. Practical: _____

b. Reflect on that for a moment. A man who is fully human, fully engaged in his culture, but “without sin”.

c. No one who “abides” (17x in John’s letters. Lives deeply in Christ) makes a continual practice of sinning.

i. **WHY NOT??** (according to John – and rest of NT for that matter)

A: _____

ii. Hope is secured, made confident, through abiding.

V. 7-9: Unrighteous people act unrighteously because that is the core of who they are. It’s their CPU. Righteous people CAN NOW act righteously because that is the core of who they are. It’s there new CPU (see **Gal. 2:20, 2 Cor. 5:17**).

V.9: again, says it all and says it well. A logical conclusion.

“The verbs = indicate the abiding influence of His seed within everyone who is born of God, and that which enables John to affirm without fear of contradiction that one cannot go one living in habitual sin. Indeed, “if he should thus continue in sin, it would indicate that that person was never born again.””

See John 3:3-8 on being “born again”.

Who is the active party in being born again? Who is the passive/recipient party in being born again? (Greek verb usage – active and passive). Greeks thought they could think their way into finding true life OR doing enough to please the multiple god’s.

“Cannot keep sinning”

- a. You are born again. Transformed, Justified.
- b. Adopted by God – child of God. Heavenly Father is very active in your life now, protection, care, etc.
- c. The Holy Spirit in you gives you new affections and priorities. Awakens your conscience to sin and repentance.
- d. You are truly a new creature now, the old has gone and new has come.
- e. **HOWEVER**, do Christians continue to sin? YES. But not a natural practice of sin for self-glory, with no fear of God and little sense of conscience.

V. 10: Evidence, clear marking, visible. The indicating marks of a true child of God.
Proof = loves his brother. "John's moral test to identify true believers." See also Jn. 13:34-35.

Loves His Brother:

1. **Connected to the Great Commandment.**
2. **Opposite of hate (strong aversion to, prejudice against).**
3. **Putting a priority of focus on, volitional act of self-sacrifice for the good of another. Not an expectation of Perfectionism but a new general direction. A growing fruit of the Spirit. Also not in a sense of religiosity – proving yourself to God or earning his favor.**
 - a. **Example for me: cycling, then and now.**
 - b. **Example for you? _____**
4. **Primary context in 1 John: Fellow believers (Greek vs. Jew, rich vs. poor, geographic region vs. another geographic region, etc). Secondly, we should have a certain love for all mankind since we are all created by God in His image and have dignity.**

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the differences between a Christian's experience of sin and a non-believers experience of sin?
2. One author has translated "abide" to mean "live deeply in Christ." What does, and doesn't, this look like today?
3. According to our passage today, how might you reply to a person who claims that Christians are hypocrites? How can we learn from people who might rightly be seeing us that way?
4. Love of self (putting priority position on, violation act of dedication to) is a key attitude to being a sinner. Love of brother is evidence of true Christianity, true status as a child of God. What are some ways of thinking that can help us SHIFT from love of self to love of brother?

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Week 5: 3:11-24

V. 11 – 15: WHAT IS NOT LOVING ONE ANOTHER - The story of Cain (Gen. 4:1-12) READ IT

- a. Why did he murder his brother? Because his deeds were evil and his brothers righteous.
 - i. Explanation: first, murder is the ultimate form of wickedness and self-centeredness. It crosses the line of what God allows us to do. Second, the text says that God “had no regard” for Cain’s sacrifice (Gen. 4:5) but He did for Abel’s. The object of sacrifice (offering to God) was not the issue. It was the HEART CONDITION of each of the men. Third, Cain was angry at God and Abel. His heart condition was so bad that it lead him to actually murder his brother. This is an extreme example of how far a sinful heart can go.
- b. V. 13. The world hates you because they are sinners, not born again. It’s natural to them. They are in darkness and do not have the light. They get stirred up with hate toward us like Cain did toward Abel.
 - i. Two forms of the word Hate are used in 1 John:
 1. We’ve already seen – strong aversion or prejudice toward.
 2. This hate is also an emotive voice – stirred up feelings of evil toward.
- c. V. 15: Hate is murder. Murder = the unlawful act of one image of God (human being) taking away the life of another image bearer. Only God has the right to do this.
 - i. Jesus on the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:43). How is hate the taking away of life like murder is? _____

 - ii. An ONGONG PRACTICE of hate is evidence that one is not abiding in Christ, or that one is in the light. He is still in darkness.

V. 16 – 18: WHAT LOVE IS – Living like Jesus (laying down your life for others)

- a. Laying down your life: Willful act of care for others. Sacrificing oneself toward. Putting them in a place of priority. *A big component of this is = taking time to notice others (v. 17).*

1. LOVE (Gk. Agape, Agapo, Phileo).

a. Basic Definition: Giving one’s self to another for their good.

b. Agape – God’s perfect love.

c. Agapo, Phileo – our reflective love of God toward others, though imperfect. Includes the whole person – the mind, heart and will.

d. Latin translation = charity.

b. Example: v.17 –

- i. meeting the *known* physical needs of others. Meets a need you have personally seen. An opportunity laid in front of you.
- ii. “closes his heart” – lit. locks up, puts up a barrier that prevents one from action.

What are things that lock up our hearts?

v. 18:

- i. Not in word/talk: mere outward expression. “talk is cheap”
- ii. In deed/truth: “genuine movement of the whole being” fueled by the truth living in us.

BIG QUESTIONS FOR THE BOOK AS A WHOLE

1. WHY SHOULD WE DO 16-18 (Love by laying down our lives for others)?

A1: Jesus as King and Lord commands us to.

A2: It’s what we were designed to do before the Fall (Restoration of the image of God)

2. WHAT ARE SOME WAYS WE AS AMERICAN SUBURBAN CHRISTIANS CAN DO THIS WITH ONE ANOTHER TODAY?

V. 19-24: The Commandment we keep

- a. By this = acts of laying down our lives for the good of others.
 - i. Christian fruit is meant to act as an assurance of our salvation.
 - ii. Read James 2:14-26 again.

b. V. 20-21 - Our hearts condemning us and the work of God in our hearts

i. Skip.

c. V. 22-24: The Commandment(s) – of Jesus

i. What are the Commandments (plural) in verse 22 we keep (affirmative)?

iii. “Keep” in Greek – Guard, Obey. We know the obey idea, what’s this guard idea? Protect, value-treasure, keep committed to, and pass it on to others.

ii. Then why does he then say “the Commandment” (singular) in verse 23?

Answer: Those two are simply summed up into one overarching commandment of Christ. Just like the Great Commandment actually has two parts, but is called The Great Commandment (singular).

iii. Keep his commandments may also mean – His teachings overall (which all fall under the main heading of Believe in the Son and Love others).

iii. See Galatians 6:2 and 1 Tim. 6:13-14.

V. 24: We abide in God and God abides in us

i. Proof we are abiding in God = whoever does v.23.

ii. Proof God is abiding in us = The Spirit whom He has given us.

iii. Fruit bearing is evidence of our salvation. But, fruit bearing is only possible through the Holy Spirit God has given us. Cool clarification that humbles us!

The Epistle of 1 John
Northshore Bible Church
By: Seth Stiles
Summer 2024

Week 6: 4:1-21

V. 1-6: Test the spirits (teachers/teachings)

1. John believes there is a spirit behind everything that is taught.

spirits (Gk.) = (a) a being is behind the teaching. Influencing the teaching. From the spirit realm. (b) Intention, agenda behind the teaching.

Test (Gk.) = lit. see what country it's from. To find out how genuine it is.

2. Why do this? Isn't this judgmental or prideful? Because FALSE TEACHERS/TEACHINGS are prevalent. False teaching/teachers have the "spirit" of error fueling them.

3. How do I know what is false teaching? V. 2-3.

i. Original context: Gnosticism. Spiritual experiences, special knowledge = good. Physical things = bad, incomplete, corrupt, lower on the shelf of truth.

ii. Jesus is the Truth become flesh (John 1). He's not an experience, dream, some claimed special anointing or knowledge. He's definite and has appeared to show perfect Truth to ALL people!

ii. Orthodoxy today – A way to test claims: Apostles creed, Nicene Creed, Essential doctrinal statements stating the fundamentals of the faith.

iii. Character traits of false teachings or false teachers:

1. Deny part of scripture.
2. Add to the scriptures.
3. Hold to obscure views on the scriptures.
4. Make small things a big thing.
5. Focuses on the leader and his anointing from God.
6. Seeks growth, personal attention/glory and worlds blessing too much.

iv. Why should I care about false teachings/teachers so much?

- a. My good and the church's good.
- b. God's honor.
- c. For the general good of the world (ex. absolute morals are good for all people).

4. God is dedicated to protecting His flock from the evil one and false teachers. He is stronger than the evil one if we keep our eyes on Him.

5. Verse 6 is a good evaluation point to discern false teachers.

i., Listens to God – Not mystical voices or experience or special knowledge (gnostic). *Listens to God from... the Spirit of God, the Word of God and faithful, true people of God.* Example: The Apostles.

V. 7-21: God is Love

Repeat of many things John has already said or is trying to make clear. A BOOK OF CONTRAST.

Verses 7-12 = love used 13x

Definition: LOVE (Gk. Agape, Agapo, Phileo).

a. *Basic Definition: Giving one's self to another for their good. Kindness, devotedness.*

b. *Agape – God's perfect love.*

c. *Agapo, Phileo – our reflective love of God toward others, though imperfect. Includes the whole person – the mind, heart and will.*

d. *Latin translation = charity.*

How He Loves us (8-10, 16):

8: God is Love (His nature can't help but do this and He does it perfectly)

9-10: (a.) Sent his son – a picture of loving self-sacrifice for the needs of others (b.) *a propitiation* for our sins (completely satisfactory sacrifice/atonement/substitute in order to grant us forgiveness and eternal reconciliation with God).

i. Ephesians 2:1-10 is a good, brief explanation of this rescue plan. In this passage, the Bible says our sin produced, and produces, spiritual death. Because of it, we can no longer live in loving order and peace with God and others as we were originally designed to. But, God, the offended party and righteous Judge, took the *initiative* to reconcile us to himself and rescue us from His judgement on us! Our condition was so bad, there was nothing we could invent or do good enough to fix it or reconcile us to God. God did this by sending Jesus to live and die in our place, as our *substitute*. To God, it was the only way to fix the situation. But, the greatest news of all is that there is nothing we must do to contribute to this rescue plan. The text says it is a "gift of God." What is the nature of a gift? It is something of value lovingly given from someone to someone else with no expectation of payment in return. *In other words, for us to be rescued, all we must do is two things: (a) admit that we need rescuing (this can be the hardest part) and (b) believe (trust in) that Jesus lived a perfect life in my place and died on the cross in my place in order that I might receive forgiveness for my sin and rebellion toward God.* Note: verse ten does tell us that "good works" are a part of our salvation – but they flow from, and are a result of, our salvation. They are not something that will earn our salvation.

16: The fact that God did 9-10 proves that love is part of His essential nature. What proves that His love is in us and part of our nature now?.....

Our Response to Gods Love for Us (11-13, 15, 19):

V. 11-12: We see God, and other people see God, as we love one another!

i. Responsive Evangelism in the early church: As Christians lived differently, people noticed. People would come to them asking them about spiritual things and the gospel.

ii. Responsive Evangelism today – I think this is huge in a post-modern and post-Christian culture. (compared to salesman evangelism).

iii. **Witnesses: SEE HANDOUT.**

V. 13: Our love for God, demonstrated in our love for others, gives us assurance that we are indeed abiding in Him.

V. 15: Whoever confesses (makes public confession – not just keeps it a private belief) that Jesus is who He says He is, is proof that God lives in that person.

i. Examples: at baptism, when asked by others.

V. 19: Great humbling verse. He loved us first. This enables us to love him back and to love others. The order here is very important.

[V. 17 clarification:

Discussion Questions:

1. Biblically, what are some reasons why God didn't have to send His son for us? Ex. Rom. 5:6-10.
2. Biblically, what are some reasons why God did send His son for us? Ex. Eph. 1:12.
3. In light of question 1-2, do you see yourself as someone who has truly received the undeserved, totally perfect, self-sacrificing, merciful, patient, totally committed love of God and Jesus?

The Epistle of 1 John
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Week 7: 5:1-21

5:1-12: Final Confirmations

v. 1-3: How do we know we are children of God?

Because....we believe in Christ and obey (walk/habit/practice NOT PERFECTION) Him. This belief is displayed, or proven by, our love for others.

v. 4-5: Our faith has overcome the world.

i. victory over it – that which is against us individually and as a church.

ii. **Our Faith** – weapon language. Our faith enables us to endure the dangers, persecutions, troubles that come from the world; the attacks on us. Grammar recognizes the *object* of our faith that gives strength to our *exercise* of faith. Object = the true nature of Christ and what Christ has done. Possible translation, “this is the means of victory [over the attacks of the world], namely what we believe about Jesus who has already overcome the world.”

a. **FAITH – Faith is the most significant issue in the Bible in terms of human action.** Faith is more important to God than we know. He knows how hard it can be and will be rewarded greatly.

b. FAITH – yes we exercise it, but God grants it to us as a gift and strengthens and sustains it through our lives supernaturally.

c. FAITH – It’s not how much faith we have that ultimately matters, it’s what is our faith is IN that matters. IN = promises and character of God, Christ himself.

iii. We overcome what? A: the evils of the world’s system. This is not to be understood as avoiding or escaping from sinners as people.

v. 6-8: Three that testify (witness) that the gospel of Christ is truth.

i. Spirit – given to Christ and the church. His work confirms the truth of the message and enables us to live it out.

ii. Blood – blood of atonement in Christ. Propitiation – enough to satisfy complete justice and to be pronounced innocent. Blood = life.

iii. Water – Cleaning of sin symbolized in water baptism of Christ and members of the church.

iv. Three that testify is important in a court of Jewish law.

v. 11-12: Remember where true and eternal life comes from.

i. Remember, Greeks and gnostics loved trying to find where true life was found.

ii. John tells us that everything they are looking for is perfectly summed up and provided in the Son – Jesus. Exclusively so – Sola Christus.

iii. “Life” is another term important to John in 1 Jn. and the gospel of John. Meaning is usually (a) eternal life promised and being experienced in the present

(i.e, a reality but also an incomplete foretaste of what's to come). (b) whole-life, well-being, full knowledge of truth.

5:13-21: Some Final Points

v. 13: I've written this so that - Know you have eternal life (Jn. 20:31)

i. Know – have confidence in. Trustworthy thing to believe in and wait for.

v. 14-15: Ask and it shall be given.

i. Because we are children of God.

ii. It's temporary provision for our needs, showing that God loves in deed not just in truth himself (as we are to do to others).

iii. "according to his will" – always put this in your prayers. These are the prayers that are answered. Jesus did so in the Lord's Prayer and in the garden.

v. 16-18: Sin that leads to death

i. A continuation of his encouragement about prayer.

ii. The Message interprets it well:

¹⁶⁻¹⁷ For instance, if we see a Christian believer sinning (clearly I'm not talking about those who make a practice of sin in a way that is "fatal," leading to eternal death), we ask for God's help and he gladly gives it, gives life to the sinner whose sin is not fatal. There is such a thing as a fatal sin, and I'm not urging you to pray about that. Everything we do wrong is sin, but not all sin is fatal.

¹⁸⁻²¹ We know that none of the God-born makes a practice of sin—fatal sin. The God-born are also the God-protected. The Evil One can't lay a hand on them. We know that we are held firm by God; it's only the people of the world who continue in the grip of the Evil One. And we know that the Son of God came so we could recognize and understand the truth of God—what a gift!—and we are living in the Truth itself, in God's Son, Jesus Christ. This Jesus is both True God and Real Life. Dear children, be on guard against all clever facsimiles.

iii. What is the sin that leads to death? A: People who stubbornly reject the gospel and want to continue to walk in darkness.

v. 19-20: We are under God. The world is under the Evil One.

i. "understanding" – gnosis. (Gnosticism).

ii. "true" – truth is referred to as a Person not a lofty, unreachable concept only given to a few.

v. 21: Keep yourself from idols.

- i. Interesting way to close out the letter, right?
- ii. Message translation – “little children of God, be on guard against all forms of clever facsimiles”. Fake copies of (a) of truth [philosophies] or (b) of God in the form of false gods [ceremonies or religions].
- iii. An idol – anything we look to for life and right standing with God (gods) OR anything we value as much as or more than God.
- iv. You can see the connection here to both the first commandment and the great commandment!

Discussion Questions:

1. Can anyone give us a story when you clearly had your faith tested or when your faith really helped you overcome something?
2. Are there still idols in the world today in the context of something people go to to try to make them right with God, with the fake gods or simply to make them look super-spiritual? What idols (fake copies of God or truth) have you believed or have overcome?

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The Epistle of 1 John
Northshore Bible Church
By: Seth Stiles
Summer 2024

Week 8: Final Reflections and Lessons Learned

1. Potential Key Verses:

3:9, **3:16-18**, 3:23, 4:10, 4:19, 5:13

2. Key words used multiple times:

Love (33x)⁸, **Abide(s)** (23x)⁹ Walk-Practice¹⁰, Light/Darkness¹¹, Keep¹², Sin¹³

⁷ I believe that the majority of the usage of the term idol or idolatry in the Bible really does have (a) an OT and first century pagan context in mind - the worship of false gods, fashioning of items or celebration of ceremonies to those false gods OR false teachings about the one true God. (b) Also, I believe this term should be applied today in the context of all the false religions of the world. (c) Calvin famously said that our hearts are idol factories. I do believe the idea of idols as being non-religious things (ex. sex, power, anger, materialism, etc.) are also referred to as idols/idolatry in the Bible, but not as often and not as directly. Also, this is not the use of the word idol that John is using here.

⁸ Clearly John loves this term. See definition above. In this letter and in his gospel, it is rooted in God’s love for us and Christ’s perfect modelling of it.

3. **A book of CONTRAST. Contrast meant to give CLARITY regarding what is true and what is not. Context – false teachers/teaching.**
4. **Remember a clear definition of Love from 1 John (vs. the world's definition or false teachers definition).**

Biblical Definition: LOVE (Gk. Agape, Agapo, Phileo).

a. *Basic Definition: Giving one's self to another for their good. Kindness, devotedness.*

b. *Agape – God's perfect love.*

c. *Agapo, Phileo – our reflective love of God toward others, though imperfect. Includes the whole person – the mind, heart and will.*

d. *Latin translation = charity.*

World's Definition: LOVE

- a. Feelings/emotions-oriented
- b. Self-centered, non-enduring
- c. Universalist – love all people no matter what they believe, etc. Lack of definite convictions.
- d. Does not have God as the ultimate source. Has no perfect human model of it.

5. **Habit/practice of sinning vs. continuing to sin for the Christian. Not the same. A Christian should be careful when reading 1 John. Yet, 1 John is a good litmus test for us too.**

⁹ 23 out of the 47 times it's used in the NT. 12 of those 47 are in the gospel of John (same author). Clearly John loves this term too. Gk. – make home with. Close intimate connection. It's root is in God's covenant love for us as adopted children of God through the provision of Christ.

NOTE: We should see that John's use of abide and love is first and foremost connected to our relationship with God. Only from this root source/relationship can a Christian abide in the teachings of Christ and love others.

¹⁰ Always used in contrast of a person's lifestyle. Sinners, those in darkness, "walk", "practice" make a continual habit of sinful living. Christians, though still sinners, no longer make it a continual practice, habit of walking in darkness. They now walk in the light as they abide in Christ.

¹¹ A description of the core nature of a person and the fruits of thought, word and deed that come out of that nature.

¹² Gk. – yes obey, but also guard or protect, a term of value.

¹³ Gk. – missing the mark (of God's righteous standards). Anything we think, feel, say or do that disobeys God and right and good rule over us.

6. Good works and love of brother, are designed partly as a tool for us give us “proof” that we are indeed in the faith, saved. Assurance.
7. Good cross-reference passages: Matt. 22: 34-40, John 1:1-14, 13:34-35, 1 Cor. 13:1-3, Jam. 2:14-26.
8. Read 2-3 John
9. Contextualization: What are ways I can live out the commands and principles of 1 John at NBC and in Covington, 2024? What are the needs today? How do I need to make adjustments in my life to do this?
10. Look to Christ always – the perfect model and giver of love!!
11. Lessons members of the class learned from our study:
