



Kew Baptist  
CHURCH



1 JOHN

**Dear friends, let us **love** one another, for **love** comes from God...This is how God showed his **love** among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might **live** through him. This is **love**: not that we **loved** God, but that he **loved** us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so **loved** us, we also ought to **love** one another. **God is love.****

**STUDY GUIDE**



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## Introduction to 1 John

It might well be that the Devil is the most proficient Bible scholar of all time; yet he is still a devil. Having Bible knowledge alone can't save you and won't automatically make you a better person. If that were the case, the Pharisees, who literally memorised the whole Old Testament, would have been ok without Jesus (they weren't) and would have been beautiful loving people (they failed here, too). Christian faith is being caught up into the divine life and relationship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and being transformed by God's love to become more loving and more holy ourselves.

1 John holds these tensions together beautifully. It's full of robust and clear truth and also a call to live holy and loving lives.

50 or so years after Jesus had died and risen again, the Apostle John writes to the young churches the letter we call 1 John. Ink and parchment were precious commodities and getting letters around was no easy task, so John has to be clear and precise in his message.

And it is so elegantly simple!

"Remember how all this got started: with Jesus!" He urges them to not take any detours or not deviate from the simple, yet profoundly transforming, message and life of Jesus. It's what we call the gospel: Jesus, the eternal Son of God, came as a person, died for our sins to reconcile us to God, rose on the third day and will come again at the end of the age to judge the living and the dead. Believe in Him, holdfast to Him, don't be taken away by "new and improved" versions of the faith. And what's more, do what he told us: Love God and love one another.

The Bible is God's gift to us to bring us the truth of Jesus and keep us in the truth, to correct us, to remind us, and to equip us for godly living. But it is not an end in itself; bringing glory to God through a loving Christ-like life is the goal. So as you read and as you study, pray the Word into your life. Meditate on it and let it seep into your being. Just as God embodied His love for us in by becoming a real life human being we could see, hear and touch, so as we let the Word of God seep deep into our lives we too will become a love-shaped community.

## When Love Came to Town (1 John 1:1-4)

Spend some time recalling the life and person of Jesus of Nazareth in the 4 Gospels. What do you notice? What stands out to you? What would it have been like to hear him speak, to see him, to sit down and break bread with him?

*Read 1 John 1:1-4*

- Now read the Gospel of John 1:1-14 and discuss any connections you see between the two passages.
- The verb “proclaim” (or “made manifest”) occurs 3 times in this passage. Highlight them and discuss what is the content of this proclamation?
- Now consider for a few moments the “why” of this proclamation. What is the reason John is proclaiming this message to them?
- Considering the content and reason of the proclamation, what do you think a Christian and the church should be on about? What is our “core business” or what is our unique mission?
- In v. 2, the word translated “eternal life” can also mean “new age” or “coming age”. The basic Jewish idea was that there is the present age of evil, sin and suffering, and a new age God would bring in at the end of time. But NT Wright notes:

*“But the secret at the heart of the early Christian movement was that the age to come had already been revealed. The future had burst into the present, even though the present time wasn’t ready for it. The word for that future was Life, life as it was meant to be, life in its full, vibrant meaning, a life which death tried to corrupt, thwart and kill but a life which had overcome death itself and was now on offer to anyone who wanted to come and take it. Life itself had come to life, had taken the form of a human being, coming into the present from God’s future, coming to display God’s coming age. And the name of that life-in-person is of course Jesus.”*

- What stirs inside of you as you imagine a future where Jesus fully reigns over heaven and earth? How then should we live if the new age has already begun and we have been invited into it through the Good News of Jesus?

- The word for “fellowship” is more akin to the word “communion”. It means a partnership and deep-level sharing of something in common. How does having fellowship with the Father and Son have implications for how we treat each other in the church?
- Read v. 4. What is the fruit of knowing God through Jesus Christ and having fellowship with each other? And what is the result of sharing this good news with others? Why is this so?

Spend some time praying to the Word of Life, who is now your friend forever, and praying for each other, who are now your family forever.

## Living in Light and Purity (*1 John 1:5-2:2*)

“simul justus et peccator”. This Latin phrase is attributed to the 16th century Reformer, Martin Luther. It means that Christians are “simultaneously righteous (justified) and sinners.” That is, we share the righteousness of Christ and are saved, but we still wrestle with the old sinful nature sometimes. It has also been said Christians are saints who sometimes sin. What do you make of it?

*Read 1 John 1:5-2:2*

- What are some of your observations about this passage and what themes, images and points stand out to you? Discuss these themes and their meaning and importance:
  - Light and darkness. Truth and lies. Sin and purity.
- There are 5 “if we” clauses in this passage which make a statement and then a consequence. Work through them one by one and discuss the implications of each for your lives.
- Do you think vv. 7-10 are talking about our pre-Christian experience, our present situation as Christians, or perhaps both? Why/Why not?
  - Is the purification from sin in v.7 referring to those sins before we were saved?
  - In v. 8 John says “If we claim to be without sin” (and v. 10 also). Is he talking about non-believers, or Christians?

- In v.9 God is faithful to forgive us and purify us if we confess our sins. Are these ongoing sins or only those committed before we came to Christ?

*Read 2:1-2 and then reflect on the previous discussion and questions about 1:7-10.*

- The “dear children” are Christians, and John is encouraging them not to sin. This tells us that Christians are forgiven and purified, but can still sin. The prayer Jesus taught us confirms this with its petition to “forgive us our sins”. But Christians are free and empowered not to sin. Finally, there is still mercy and atonement when we do sin (“But if anybody does sin”).
- NT Wright says: *It’s a delicate balance. Sinners need to know that Jesus has died for them, and that they can be fully and freely forgiven. Forgiven sinners need to know that this is not a reason to go on sinning. Both are true, and are at the very heart of what it means to be a Christian.* Discuss this together.
- It might be helpful to think of the pre-Christian sins as those which rightly separated us from God and incurred God’s righteous judgement. On believing in the Good News of Jesus and being reborn by the Holy Spirit, these sins are cancelled and forgiven, and Christ’s own righteousness is bestowed upon us. But we are being made perfect and holy and God can and does convict of us of ongoing and intermittent sinful actions (things we do that we ought not to do) and sinful omissions (things we haven’t done that we ought to). Discuss.

Spend some time praying in thankfulness and praise for the joy and good news of being forgiven and righteous because of what Christ has done. Be open to the Holy Spirit bringing present things to mind that you may need to confess to God or make right with someone you have wronged. In any case, give thanks that “he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and purify us from ALL unrighteousness.”

## Loving like Jesus (1 John 2:3-17)

- How easily can you spot a fake person whose words and actions are inconsistent?

*Read 1 John 2:3-17*

- Consider these links John makes:
  - Truly knowing God means obeying his commands (2:4-5a)
  - Truly living in the light means loving other believers (2:9-10)
- Would you naturally make these links? Why/why not?
- Have you ever seen these inconsistencies in other Christians? Or yourself?
- How did Jesus live? Do you find 2:6 challenging?
- John extends the metaphor of light and dark to seeing and stumbling (2:10-11)
  - What might seeing and stumbling look like in real terms?
- Are you surprised how starkly John contrasts love of the world with love for God? (2:15-17)
- What does this mean for God's beautiful creation or God's good gifts in this world?
- How is 2:17 an encouragement for us when we find it hard to live God's way in this world?

Spend some time praying that your love for God would increase and repenting of any love for the things of this world that is taking God's place in your heart. Pray for God's grace and strength to live as Jesus did.

## Love is Truth (1 John 2:18-27)

- Are you naturally trusting or suspicious of other people?

*Read 1 John 2:18-27*

- Consider John's two descriptions of "antichrists" from 2:18-19 and then 2:22-23.

- What kind of people are these?
- Do they seem like broad or narrow groupings?
- Have you had any friends who appeared to follow Jesus but don't do so any longer?
  - Do you find John's description in 2:19 helpful?
- Consider John's strong words in 2:23.
  - What might this mean for people of other faiths?
  - Does this line up with Jesus' words in John 14:6-7?
- What is John's recommended protection for his readers against going astray? (2:24-27)
- What does it mean for God's word to "remain" in us? (2:24)
- John wrote to warn his readers about certain people (2:26).
  - Do we need to hear such warnings today?
- What does it mean for us to "remain" in God? (2:24, 27)

Spend some time praying that God will give you power and strength to remain true and faithful to Him. Pray for those you know who have walked away from the faith or who are struggling with fear and doubt.

## Love Overcomes Darkness (*1 John 2:28-3:10*)

- How important do you think it is to "do good"?

*Read 1 John 2:28-3:10*

- How does John describe believers from 2:29-3:2:
  - Now?
  - When Jesus returns?
- What is the difference?
- What does 3:3 suggest about how "perfect" we presently are?
- How do you feel about John's bold statements about believers being done with sin? (3:6-10, esp. 3:6 and 3:9)
- Compare this to what John has just said about our present and future

identity (2:29-3:2), and to what he wrote earlier in 1:8-10.

- How can we make sense of this?
- Does 3:7 suggest that doing good/what is right is what makes someone “righteous”?
  - How does 3:9 clarify this?
- John seems very black and white about those who do good and those who do evil and who they belong to (3:7-8, 10).
  - Is this always true in your experience?
  - What might be John’s purpose in writing this? (3:3, 10)

Spend some time praying that God will empower us to do good, live in and know His gift of righteousness, and that our lives would please Him.

## Love Hurts; Love Heals (1 John 3:11-24)

Today we have many laws and regulations aimed to stop violence, increase inclusivity and limit harm to one another. Why do you think human attempts to limit hurt, abuse and violence never get rid of them altogether? Why does hate persist in our world?

*Read 1 John 3:11-24*

- Vv. 11-15: John takes us right back to Genesis to the story of Cain and Abel to highlight the hate and violence that we experience and know. But just before this he takes us back again to Jesus and his message to “Love one another”.
  - Why did Cain murder Abel?
  - How does John link this story with the world hating us?
  - In what ways is someone who hates another person like Cain?
- Vv. 16-18: According to John, how do we know what love is? In what ways is love expressed through his answer?
  - What is the proper response to so great a love?
  - Is loving just a feeling or much more than that?
  - How do we know we really love others?



- Vv. 19-24: Perhaps John sensed his hearers might be a bit nervous and feel shame that they don't always love as they ought; as Jesus showed us. Discuss his counsel in vv. 19-20.
  - What has God commanded us to do as Christians? How do we live this out?
  - What is the fruit and blessing of keeping God's commands?
  - How do we know that God lives in us?

Spend some time praying for our broken and divided world, thanking God for the love we have seen and experienced in Jesus, and for our lives to be more fully centred in faith in Jesus Christ and overflowing with love for one another.

## The Spiritual Power of Love (1 John 4:1-6)

How do we discern what is true and Christ-centred and that which is fluff and false? And why do educated, seemingly sane and rational people end up in dangerous, and sometimes deadly cults and sects? Discuss.

*Read 1 John 4:1-6*

- Vv. 1-3: John is adamant that not every preacher and teacher of Christ is authentic. In fact, some are dangerous and deceitful.
  - What test does he apply for Christian orthodoxy and why is such a test important?
  - What does he say about those who do not acknowledge Jesus?
  - Why is it important to acknowledge, and what might it mean in practice to acknowledge that Jesus Christ came in the flesh? (think of his teaching, actions, death on a cross, resurrection).
  - While there is diversity in the body of Christ, what are the central truths that must never be compromised?
- Vv. 4-6: John seeks to instill confidence in the believers that they need not fear any spiritual or earthly enemies.
  - What assurances does he give to believers and how does this help us?

- John uses “us” and “them” phrases that can sound arrogant. But what do you think he is trying to say to believers?
- How can we live like Jesus in the world when there are real and actual divisions between those who believe in Jesus Christ and know God and those who don’t?
- NT Wright says: *“His whole letter, as we see right at the end, is about holding on to the true God and rejecting the claims of idols. And the way we know the true God is through Jesus. You can’t get round that.”* Discuss.

Spend some time praying for the pastors and leaders of your church that they will teach and preach only what is true and glorifying to God. Pray for people you know who don’t know Jesus that their eyes and hearts would be open to see and hear the truth of who He is and what He has done for them.

## Love Overcomes Fear (1 John 4:7-21)

Love is likely the most sung about, talked about, cried about and celebrated thing in the world. Why is this and in what ways is the Christian view of life different or similar to popular ideas?

*Read 1 John 4:7-21*

- Count how many times the word “love” appears in this section. Why is love so important?
- Vv. 7-12: You could spend a whole year on what John says in these few verses!
  - Look carefully at what happens when we love and don’t love and why we ought to love. Discuss.
  - How does John describe how God shows love for us? Why is this love?
  - Is loving others a duty or a delight, hard or easy, a blessing or a burden? Or all?
- Vv. 13-16b: How does John provide us with assurance of our

relationship to God and our right-standing with God? Do you have that assurance in your own life?

- Vv. 16a-18: John uses 3 words to distill and summarise the message of the Bible and the nature of the Trinity: God is love. Spend some time discussing the implications of this.
  - From what John has previously said, how do we love and how do we get to live in God?
  - What do you think John means by saying “In this world we are like Jesus”?
  - Why do we fear and what might its presence in our lives be a signal for?
- Vv. 19-21: In these verses John insists that love is not merely a feeling or a philosophy but a reality that must be manifested in our lives.
  - Why is it now possible for us to love?
  - Why does John insist that our love for God and for other people is intricately interwoven? How can we do both consistently and how can we grow in love?
  - Is loving like Jesus an optional extra for the Christian or the defining mark? Why?
  - In what ways do you see God’s love in your own life and in the life of your church community? Discuss how you personally, and your church community, could grow in love and find new ways to express God’s love.

Spend some time praying together to the God of Love, thanking Him for His great love. Pray too that the Holy Spirit would give you more power and grace to love like Jesus and to know God’s love experientially in your heart and affections.

## Love Leads to Eternal Life (1 John 5:1-21)

How might we live fully committed and devoted lives to God, and yet live in this world? Maybe look to Jesus and discuss how he managed to do it.

*Read 1 John 5:1-21*

- Consider what John says about obeying God's commands (5:2-3)
  - Does this make following Jesus sound legalistic?
- Where in Jesus' life did water, blood and the Spirit feature in particular ways? (5:6-11)
- How might the presence of these three things demonstrate the "testimony" of 5:11?
- How do you feel reading verse 5:12?
  - Compare this to Jesus' words in John 3:18 and 3:36
- How does confidence about salvation lead to confidence in prayer? (5:13-15)
  - Consider some of the things salvation implies according to John (e.g. 5:1, 2).
- Compare John's words about prayer in 5:14-15 to James' words in James 5:15-16.
  - Do you find John's comments helpful?
- How can our prayers help fellow believers who sin? (5:16-17)
  - Have you ever experienced this in your life?
- Read again the three things that "We know ..." in 5:18-20. These are almost three summary statements of much of what John has already written in his letter.
  - Which of these do you find most challenging?
  - Has anything else you've read so far in 1 John helped to clarify this?

Spend some time praying and thanking God for his love and for the gift of Jesus Christ to the world. Pray for boldness and courage to love well and to share the wonderfully Good News of Jesus with those in your life who don't yet believe.