

1 JOHN

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Do you want to know God? Is the truth about God important to you? Knowing God truly is the overarching theme of John’s letters, and in this five-week class, we will look at his first letter.

In a world that was filled with conflicting views of truth, much as it is even now, Jesus said, “Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:3). Jesus defines eternal life as knowing God, for it is only through responding to God’s self-revelation that any of us can come to know Him and enjoy life with Him. John wrote this brief letter in a time of spiritual confusion—when there were conflicting views about God and Jesus—in order to assure his readers of their eternal life because they knew God truly in Christ. His words are as relevant today as ever.

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1 JOHN 1

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— 2 the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— 3 that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. 4 And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. 5 This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. 6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

*2 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 2 He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. 3 And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. 4 Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him.
— 1 John 1:1-2:4 ESV*

BACKGROUND

- Authorship – The Apostle John, the son of Zebedee, the author of the fourth Gospel and the book of Revelation.
- Purpose – The general aim of the epistle is fellowship with God (the Father and Son) and with his people. The issue is not the readers’ possession of eternal life but the expression of it in their lives. John is also concerned that certain false teachings about Jesus and the gospel might cause them to lose fellowship.

ETERNAL LIFE IS A PERSON WITH WHOM WE RELATE (1:1-4)

1. John claims eyewitness authority concerning the Word of Life. (1)
2. The Eternal Life that was with the Father has appeared – John testifies to it and he proclaims it to his readers. (2)
3. John proclaims what he has seen and heard so that his readers might also have fellowship with those who were eyewitnesses and with God the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. (3)
4. John writes to make the joy of fellowship complete. (4)

WALKING IN THE LIGHT (1:5-2:4)

1. God is light and in Him there is no darkness – NONE! God is morally pure. This has profound implications for our having fellowship with him. (5)
2. Fellowship and darkness are mutually exclusive. If we claim fellowship while walking in darkness, we are not living according to the truth. (6)
3. To maintain fellowship, we must walk in the light. Walking in the light does not mean sinless perfection, but that we are open and honest before God regarding our sin, so that the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. (7)
4. If we deny our sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not shaping our thought and attitudes. (8)
5. When we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from EVERY unrighteousness. (9)
6. If we deny our sin, we call God a liar and His word is not in us (that is, His is not shaping our thoughts and attitudes. (10)
7. Though sin is a daily reality for the believer, it is nevertheless to be vigorously resisted. If we do sin, however, we should not lose heart. Jesus, the Righteous one, is our advocate. (2:1) (See also Luke 22:31-33; Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25)

31 “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, 32 but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” 33 Peter said to him, “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.” — Luke 22:31-33 ESV

Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. — Romans 8:34 ESV

Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. — Hebrews 7:25 ESV

8. Jesus himself is the atonement not only for our sins but for the sins of the whole world. He has both appeased God’s wrath (propitiation) and removed our guilt (expiation). (2:2)
9. Deeper experiential knowledge of God is demonstrating in obedience to his commandments. This knowledge must not be confused with basic saving knowledge which all believers have. (2:3-4) (See John 14:21, 23-24)

Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.” Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. 24 Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me. — John 14:21, 23-24 ESV

1 JOHN 2

3 And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. 4 Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, 5 but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: 6 whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. 7 Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. 8 At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. 9 Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. 10 Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. 11 But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

12 I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake. 13 I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, children, because you know the Father. 14 I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. 17 And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. 18 Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. 19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. 20 But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge, 21 I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth. 22 Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. 23 No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. 24 Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. 25 And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life. 26 I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. 27 But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him. — 1 John 2:3-27 ESV

KNOWING THE GOD OF LIGHT (2:3-11)

Deeper experiential knowledge of God is demonstrated in obedience to his commandments. This knowledge must not be confused with basic saving knowledge which all believers have. (See John 14:21, 23-24)

1. Keeping (that is, guarding) God's commands results in the full expression of God's love.
2. Abiding in Him means living as Jesus did.
3. This is not a new commandment but the same one they heard from the beginning. (See John 13:34)
4. At the same time, it is new in the sense that it belongs to the new age which is to come and has already dawned. The old order (darkness) is passing away.
5. The one who loves his brother is in the light; the one who hates his brother is in darkness.

THE READERS MUST RESIST THE ANTICHRISTS (FALSE TEACHERS) BY (2:12-27)

1. Recognizing their spiritual assets
 - a. They have experienced forgiveness.
 - b. They have known the Father.
 - c. They have overcome the evil one.
2. Recognizing their spiritual adversaries
 - a. Resisting the world
 - i. The term "world" here stands for the world system that is opposed to God (or at best ignores God) and is under Satan's control.
 - ii. Love for worldly things and God's love are mutually exclusive.
 - iii. The "world," as both the origin and goal of wrong desire, are passing away.

b. Resisting the antichrists

- i. It is the last hour; that is, the time immediately prior to the establishment of God's kingdom on earth. The presence of antichrists confirms this.
- ii. The antichrists are
 1. False teachers.
 2. Who were claiming legitimacy based on prior fellowship with the apostles.
 3. Who were denying the truth of the gospel message.
 4. John denies their legitimacy based on the fact that they "went out from us" (i.e. they did not continue in fellowship with the apostles or their doctrine).
- iii. John's readers have all they need to resist the antichrists:
 1. They have already been taught the truth.
 2. The true message was confirmed to them by the Holy Spirit.
 3. They have no need for someone else to teach them "new truth" (that is, contrary to what they were already taught).
 4. They need only abide in him (that is, Christ).

1 JOHN 3

28 And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. 29 If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him. — 1 John 2:28-29 ESV

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 2 Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. 3 And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. 4 Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. 5 You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. 6 No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. 7 Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. 8 Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. 9 No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. 10 By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

11 For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. 12 We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. 13 Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. 14 We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. 15 Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. 16 By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. 17 But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? 18 Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. 19 By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; 20 for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. 21 Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; 22 and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. 23 And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. — 1 John 3:1-23 ESV

CALLED TO BE GOD'S CHILDREN (2:28 - 3:10A)

1. Abiding in Christ leads to our having confidence before him at his coming. This is the theme of all that follows up through 4:19.
2. One can do righteous acts only if one is born of God who alone is righteous.
3. Look! How truly magnificent is the love of God that we should be called his children!

4. We are his children now and yet the transformation will not be complete until we see him. Then we shall be like him. By hoping in Christ, the believer purifies himself even as Christ is pure.
5. We are to repudiate sin as it goes completely against God's character and his goal in Christ, which is to do away with sin forever. Sin is incongruous with abiding in him and the one who sins is in a state of ignorance toward God. The one who sins manifests the character of the evil one.
6. The one born of God is made known by acts of righteousness. The new nature of the believer in Christ cannot sin, because he or she is born of God (see Romans 7:20-25 and Galatians 2:20). Righteousness comes from God, sin from the evil one.

CHRISTIAN LOVE (3:10B - 23)

1. What Love Is Not (3:10b-15)
 - a. A lack of love reveals a lack of connectedness to God.
 - b. A Christian who lacks love emulates Cain not Abel.
 - c. Hate is the default position of the world not the Christian.
 - d. A Christian who lacks love is not manifesting life but rather abides in death (see Romans 7:9-11,24).
2. What Love Is (3:16-18)
 - a. Love is sacrificial, giving of one's life for another, even as Christ did for us.
 - b. Love is real, practical action.
3. What Love Does for Believers (3:19-23)
 - a. The one who loves can know that he or she is acting according to the truth.
 - b. The one who loves can have boldness before God in prayer.
 - c. The one who seeks to please God asks according to His will and receives what he asks
 - d. God's will is that we believe in Jesus Christ and love one another as he commanded us.

1 JOHN 4

24 Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us. 4:1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. 4 Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. 5 They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. 6 We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. 10 In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. 13 By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. 15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. 16 So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. 17 By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. 19 We love because he first loved us. — 1 John 3:24-4:19

MUTUAL ABIDING (3:24)

1. The one who keeps His commandments not only abides in Him (that is, in Christ or God), He also abides in the obedient believer (see also John 15:4-5; 14:23).
2. We can know this (that God abides in us) by means of the Spirit He has given us.

TEST THE SPIRITS – RECOGNIZING GOD’S SPIRIT (4:1 – 6)

1. We are not to believe every spirit, but we must test them to see if they are true. The world is full of false messages and messengers.
2. Here is the test: the spirit that confesses the true identity of Jesus Christ and the purpose of his coming is the true Spirit of God. The spirit that does not make this confession is in fact the spirit of the antichrist, which is already here in the world.

3. The power to overcome the spirit of the antichrist already resides in us: The Spirit of God Himself.
4. The apostolic message is from God and those who know God accept it. The apostles' ministry was to proclaim the truth and to protect the church from error.

GOD IS LOVE - RECOGNIZING GOD'S INDWELLING (4:7 - 16)

1. The Spirit of God within us finds expression when we love one another, for God's very nature is love. Love is fundamental to who God is and what he does. The one who loves is both born of God and knows Him. The one who does not love does not know Him.
2. The ultimate expression of God's love is His surrendering His one and only Son so that our sin might be completely done away and that we might have life in Him. God takes the initiative in love.
3. The manner in which God has loved us obligates us to love one another. Such love for one another is possible as He abides in us.
4. By loving one another God's indwelling presence is made visible. Not only so, but the very truth of the gospel is also made evident. (See John 13:35)
5. A genuine confession of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God who guarantees eternal life to every believer, can only be made by means of divine illumination (see also John 11:25-27; Matthew 16:16-17).
6. We can know God's love for us, not only through the testimony of Scripture, but by direct experience within a loving Christian community.

PERFECT LOVE CASTS OUT FEAR - HAVING BOLDNESS ON JUDGMENT DAY (4:17 - 19)

1. God's love reaches its fullness and maturity in us only as we learn to love one another.
2. The result of God's love being perfected in us (and among us) is that we may have boldness in the day of judgment. This is because the manifestation of eternal life through us, by means of faith and love, is a true manifestation of the God who abides in us.
3. Fear is incompatible with perfect love, since fear is related to punishment.
4. All real love finds its origin and source in God.

1 JOHN 5

20 Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. 21 And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister. 5:1 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. 2 This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. 3 In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, 4 for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. 5 Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. 6 This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. 7 For there are three that testify: 8 the[a] Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement. 9 We accept human testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. 10 Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony. Whoever does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because they have not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. 11 And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. 14 This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. 15 And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him. 16 If you see any brother or sister commit a sin that does not lead to death, you should pray and God will give them life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that you should pray about that. 17 All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death. 18 We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the One who was born of God keeps them safe, and the evil one cannot harm them. 19 We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. 20 We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true by being in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. 21 Dear children, keep yourselves from idols. — 1 John 4:20-5:21

WHAT LOVING OUR BROTHERS MEANS (4:20 – 5:3A)

1. Loving God and loving our brother (i.e. fellow believer) are inseparable. That is, we cannot claim to do one without doing the other.
2. A “brother” is anyone who believes Jesus is the Christ, regardless of the quality of their walk with Him.
3. Obedience to God’s commandments is another way we show love to our fellow believers.
4. We also show our love toward God through our obedience to him.

WHAT ACTUALLY EMPOWERS OUR LOVE (5:3B - 5:15)

1. God's commands are not a great burden (see Matthew 11:30) because the person born of God has overcome the world (which resists obedience) by faith in Jesus Christ.
2. The death of Jesus Christ is essential to the gospel. He came by water (baptism) and by blood (death), not by water only (as the false teachers apparently taught - thus denying the death of Christ).
3. God's own testimony regarding Jesus Christ is that He is the only source of eternal life. John wants his readers to be assured that they have already received this gift of life through faith in Him. (See also John 3:36; 5:24)
4. We should also have confidence that God will answer our prayers when we ask according to His will. What is His will? That we obey His commandments.

WHAT FAITH AND LOVE CAN DO FOR OUR BROTHER (5:16 - 17)

1. If we see a fellow believer sinning, we ought to pray for that person with full confidence that we are praying according to God's will and that He will answer.

CHRISTIAN CERTAINTIES (5:18 - 21)

1. The new nature that God has placed in the believer is beyond the reach of the evil one.
2. The believer in Jesus Christ is on God's side over against the world which is on Satan's side.
3. Jesus Christ is the one true God and eternal life. As we abide in Him, we come to an ever-deeper experience of understanding and knowing Him.
4. Abiding in Him will keep us from idols (false gods).