

## STUDY ON THE BOOK OF FIRST JOHN

### SIN, LOVE, AND FELLOWSHIP!

Read 1 John 2:1-6

#### **Introduction**

First John seems to assume that the reader is familiar with the gospel. Rather than re-state these facts, John is concerned with building confidence in Christian believers. At the same time, his words encourage believers to examine their own lives for signs of their relationship with Christ. This letter also challenges false teachers and their incorrect claims about Jesus. Many themes are shared with the Gospel of John.

Chapters 2 and 3 lay out a detailed description of how Christian conduct is meant to be marked by obedience to the truth. Christians are called to live like Christ. Therefore, those who do not (live that way) do not have "the truth" in them. Later chapters of this letter will fill in how Christian love and conduct give us confidence in our daily lives.

#### **Fellowship and the problem of sin**

*“My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin...” (v1a)*

1 John 1:8 made it clear that sin is a fact (at least an occasional fact) in the life of the Christian. 1 John 1:9 makes it clear that there is always forgiveness for confessed sin. Yet, John wants it also to be clear that the Christian should be concerned about sin. One key reason in writing this letter was that you may not sin. This is God’s desire for the believer. If sin is inevitable for us, it is not because God has decreed that we must sin. All the resources for spiritual victory are ours in Jesus Christ and that resource is never withdrawn.

John addresses this because of the issue of relationship with God (1 John 1:3), and the fact that sin can break our fellowship with God (1 John 1:6). He wants to make it clear that God has not made a system where we must break fellowship with Him through sin.

The weakness comes in our flesh, which is not consistently willing to rely on Jesus for victory over sin. God promises that one day the flesh will be perfected through resurrection.

#### **Restoration to Fellowship**

*“... And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.” (vv1b-2)*

God’s desire is that you may not sin. Yet if we do, there is provision made — an Advocate, a defence lawyer on our side. Our Advocate is Jesus Christ Himself. We may think that our sin sets God against us. But God’s love is so great that in His love, He went to the ultimate measure to make us able to stand in the face of His holy righteousness. Through Jesus, God can be for us even when we are guilty sinners.

It is as if we stand as the accused in the heavenly court, before our righteous Judge, God the Father. Our Advocate stands up to answer the charges: “He is completely guilty your honour. In fact, he has even done worse than what he is accused of, and now makes full and complete confession before You.” The gavel slams, and the Judge asks, “What should his sentence be?” Our Advocate answers, “His sentence shall be death; he deserves the full wrath of this righteous court.” All along, our accuser Satan, is having great fun at all this. We are guilty! We admit our guilt! We see our punishment! But then, our Advocate asks to approach the bench. As he draws close to the Judge, he simply says: “Dad, this one belongs to Me. I paid his price. I took the wrath and punishment from this court that he deserves.” The gavel sounds

again, and the Judge cries out, “Guilty as charged! Penalty satisfied!” Our accuser starts going crazy. “Aren’t you even going to put him on probation?” “No!” the Judge shouts. “The penalty has been completely paid by My Son. There is nothing to put him on probation for.” Then the Judge turns to our Advocate, and says, “Son, you said this one belongs to You. I release him into Your care. Case closed!”

- A human defence lawyer argues for the innocence of his client. But our Advocate, Jesus Christ, admits our guilt — and then enters His plea on our behalf, as the one who has made an atoning sacrifice for our sinful guilt.
- Jesus Christ the righteous means that Jesus is fully qualified to serve as our Advocate, because He Himself is sinlessly perfect. He has passed heaven’s bar exam and is qualified to represent clients in heaven’s court of law.
- We need Jesus as our Advocate because Satan accuses us before God (Revelation 12:10). We need to distinguish between the condemning accusation of Satan and the loving conviction of the Holy Spirit.

### **Propitiation for our Sins**

This means that Jesus is the one who atones for and takes away our sins, and not only our sins, but also the sins of the whole world. Propitiation has the idea of presenting a gift to the gods, so as to turn away the displeasure of the gods. The Greeks thought of this in the sense of man essentially bribing the gods into doing favours for man. But in the Christian idea of propitiation, God Himself presents Himself (in Jesus Christ) as that which will turn away His righteous wrath against our sin.

Though Jesus made His propitiation for the whole world, yet the whole world is not saved and not in fellowship with God. This is because atonement does not equal forgiveness. The Old Testament Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:34) demonstrates this, when the sin of all Israel was atoned for every year at the Day of Atonement, yet not all of Israel was saved. The words *“but also for the whole world”* announce to the world that God has taken care of the sin problem by the propitiation of Jesus Christ. Sin need not be a barrier between God and man, if man will receive the propitiation God has provided in Jesus.

### **The Fruit of Fellowship**

*“Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, “I know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.” (vv3-6)*

The evidence of someone knowing God, and in fellowship with Him is that he does keep His commandments. A simple, loving obedience is a natural result of fellowship with God. We have a gracious Advocate in heaven. We have an open invitation to restoration through confession. Yet these things do not make the converted man careless about the commandments. God changes the heart at conversion and writes His law upon our heart.

The truth of this is so certain that if one does not live a life marked by obedience, his claim to fellowship (the experiential knowledge) with God can be fairly challenged and like John, we can tell this person is a liar.

### **The Love of God Perfected:**

John also makes the link between our obedience and our love for God. A perfected (the idea is mature) love for God will show itself in obedience, and the presence of this obedience and love gives us assurance that we are in Jesus (By this we know we are in Him).

Mark it, when one becomes a Christian, there is a change in his relationship with sin. Sin's probability is not eliminated in the believer until he comes to glory, but his relationship to sin is changed when he truly become a Christian.

- A Christian no longer loves sin as he once did.
- A Christian no longer brags about his sin as he once did.
- A Christian no longer plans to sin as he once did.
- A Christian no longer fondly remembers his sin as he once did.
- A Christian never fully enjoys his sin as he once did.
- A Christian no longer is comfortable in habitual sin as he once was.

The thought is brought around to a full circle. When we are abiding in Jesus, we will walk just as He walked — live lives of obedience and love. When we want to walk just as He walked, we need to begin by abiding in Him. We aren't called to imitate the way Jesus walked on water, but His every-day walk with God the Father. The spiritual power evident in the life of Jesus flowed from a faithful, regular, disciplined life of fellowship and obedience.

### **Sin, Commandment, and Love**

*“Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning. Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining. He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.” (vv7-11)*

The commandment John wrote of was at the same time both old (in the sense that it was preached to the brethren their whole Christian lives) and new (in the sense that it was called the new commandment by Jesus in John 13:34). The new commandment “to love” that Jesus spoke of in John 13:34 was really new for several reasons. One of the most important reasons was that Jesus displayed a kind of love never seen before, a love we were to imitate.

The cross points in four directions to show that the love of Jesus is:

- Wide enough to include every human being.
- Long enough to last through all eternity.
- Deep enough to reach the guiltiest sinner.
- High enough to take us to heaven.

This is a new love, a love the world had never really seen before the work of Jesus on the cross.

### **Love, Darkness, Light**

Previously in this chapter, John examined us according to the moral measure of our walk with God. Later he will examine us according to doctrine as a measure of our walk with God. Now he examines us according to our love for other Christians as a measure of our walk with God.

Just as our relationship to sin and our obedience is a measure of our fellowship with God, so also is our love for God's people. If we say that we are in the light yet hate our brother, then our claim to fellowship with the God who is light (1 John 1:5) is hollow. But the one who does love his brother shows that he abides in the light and is not stumbling.

Sometimes it is easy to think, “Following Jesus would be easy if it weren’t for all the Christians.” And many, many Christians live as the walking wounded, crippled by the scars other Christians have inflicted on them. Yet this measure still stands. If we can’t love each other, then we have no way to claim a real love for God. Our relationship with God can be measured by our love for other Christians.

On the one hand, God is merciful in requiring this, because we are measured by how we love other Christians, not those who are not Christians. On the other hand, God gives us a particularly difficult measure, because we often — perhaps rightly — expect much more from our Christian friends and associates.

The point is plain. If we lose love, then we lose everything. There is nothing left. You can do all the right things, believe all the right truths, but if you do not love other Christians, then all is lost. The three tests — moral, doctrinal, and love — all stand together, like the legs on a three-legged stool. It is all too easy for people to place “ministry” or “being right” above love in the body of Christ. We must do ministry, and we must be right, but we must do it all in love — if not in perfect actions, then following with proper repentance.

Knowing the importance that Jesus placed on our love for each other, John will go so far as to say that if we hate our brother, we are walking in darkness, and are unable to see — we have been blinded. Remember that hatred can also be expressed by indifference; true love will demonstrate itself for one another.

