

# 1 John

Lesson 1

Chapter 1:1-4

Leader Guide

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# The Word of Life

## Lesson 1, I John 1:1-4

### Prayers

### Introduction

1 John was written in 90 AD by the apostle John when he was old to instruct new Christians in God's Word. Peter, Paul, and all the other apostles were dead. John wrote his letter with the authority of an eyewitness to those who had never seen or met Jesus. The message is for us. The beginning of this letter is similar to John's gospel, with a central theme proclaiming the divinity of Jesus Christ so that his readers might receive eternal life through faith in Jesus. John instructed new Christians to live holy lives, obey God's commands, love others, and not pursue materiality (love of the world).

John's letter also includes warnings against false teachers (antichrists) and their dangerous false teachings. Heresy began creeping into Christianity as Christianity expanded into the Roman world. False teachers borrowed teachings from diverse pagan religions and Greek teachers, similar to the New Age movement today. False teachers regarded themselves as broad-minded and considered Jews and Christians as narrow-minded. Consequently, the message of the Christian gospel was becoming mixed with teachings from Plato, the occult, and astrology. The false teacher Cerinthus and the non-Christian religion of Gnosticism probably gave John his reason for writing certain things in this letter.

Gnosticism embraced many ideas about a person's spirit and physical body. The main idea was that people gain knowledge (gnosis) through a mystical revelation of their true spiritual selves. The second aspect of Gnosticism is that nothing physical or material is significant. This view leads to ideas of Asceticism (depriving of the senses) or Epicureanism (over-indulgence of the senses). The third aspect of Gnosticism is that sin does not exist. There are only states of lesser or greater enlightened knowledge. Modern-day Christian Science is an example of Gnosticism. Christian Scientists do not believe in the need for medicine or doctors because they believe that the body is the physical manifestation of the spirit, so if the body is ill, it is the spirit that needs healing.

### Background on John

1. John was an Apostle, the disciple Jesus loved John 13:23
2. He was young when he became a disciple of Jesus. John may be the young man wearing a linen garment who was seized at Jesus' arrest and forced to flee naked into the night (Mark 14:51). He outran Peter to the tomb on Resurrection Sunday.
3. He was in Jesus' inner circle with James and Peter at the transfiguration and with Peter during Jesus' arrest.
4. John and his brother James were the "Sons of Thunder" (Mark 3:17).

We usually think of John as the kindly and gentle writer of the gospel of love, but in Mark 3:17, we read that John and his brother James were called the "Sons of Thunder" who offered to call down fire from heaven on Samaritans who snubbed Jesus.

5. John lived in Ephesus, Turkey, where he wrote the letters John 1,2,3 and his gospel
6. He was imprisoned on Patmos during the reign of Emperor Domitian about 95 AD, where he wrote Revelation concerning the seven churches of Asia Minor (Turkey)
7. Domitian died in AD 96; John returned to Ephesus, where he died at the age of 95 to 100.

### Read I John 1:1-5

<sup>1Jn 1:1</sup> That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched —this we proclaim concerning the **Word of life**. <sup>1Jn 1:2</sup> The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the **Father** and has appeared to us. <sup>1Jn 1:3</sup> We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the **Father** and with his **Son, Jesus Christ**. <sup>1Jn 1:4</sup> We write this to make our joy complete.

<sup>1Jn 1:5</sup> This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: **God is light**; in him there is no darkness at all.

### Discuss

1. 1 John 1:1-3 is written as one sentence in the original Greek. What does John proclaim in this sentence?

**John was an eyewitness witness to Jesus (that which), who is eternal – was with God the Father from the beginning and is the Word of Life, and through whom you have eternal life.**

2. What does John mean by referring to Jesus as the Word of Life? Compare to John 1:1-4 and one of the following: John 3:16, Jn 5:24, Jn 6:35-40, Jn 10:9-10, Jn 11:25-26.

<sup>Jn 1:1</sup> In the beginning was the **Word**, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>Jn 1:2</sup> He was with God in the beginning. <sup>Jn 1:3</sup> Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. <sup>Jn 1:4</sup> In him was **life**, and that life was the **light** of men.

John 11:25-26 Jesus said to her [Martha] I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?

**Jesus is life because he gives us eternal life with the Father.**

**Jesus Christ is also the Word of Life because God created all life through Christ by speaking it into existence through the power of his Word. The Son has always done the will of his Father, so Christ was the word through which God spoke creation into being.**

3. John refers to light and darkness throughout his writings. He makes no distinction between calling both God and Jesus light. What does John mean by this analogy?

**God and Jesus are light because they are both holy, righteous, and pure. There is no sin (darkness) in them.**

**Jesus is also the light of men because he leads people to the Father. God's law and Jesus' commands illuminate how we should walk and live.**

4. Verse 1. Gnosticism was a bundle of Greek beliefs that emphasized knowledge and wisdom over the physical body. Some Gnostics claimed there is no sin, only a lack of wisdom. Others claimed the body was just the spiritual manifestation of the mind. How does John address Gnosticism in verse 1 to emphasize that Jesus was a physical person and not just a spirit?

**Jesus was a physical person who experienced life through all his physical senses; he was seen, heard, and touched. This addressed some gnostic teachings that Jesus Christ was only a spirit.**

5. What are some of the promises Jesus and the scriptures make about abundant life?
- Eternal life**
  - Joy in fellowship**
  - Peace with God, trusting in his provision and goodness**
  - Relationships**

6. Verses 3 and 4 refer to Christian fellowship. The Greek word for fellowship, "koinonia," is not exclusively Christian but refers to an **active** partnership of all partners.

- a. With who are we in fellowship?

**We are in fellowship with God the Father, his Son - Jesus Christ, and other Christians through our faith in Christ as our Savior.**

- b. How are we active in these aspects of fellowship?

**We are active with God by loving our neighbor, and sharing the gospel with others to keep Jesus' command to fulfill the great commission. We do not earn salvation through our work; that was Jesus' work.**

**We work with other Christians in celebrating our love for God through worship and doing the good works that he stored up for us.**

7. Verse 3-4. How was John's joy made complete? How do you experience this joy in your life?

**John's mission as an eyewitness to the life and ministry of Jesus was that people would come to faith in Christ. Their salvation was his joy.**

## Read 1 John 1:5-10

<sup>1Jn 1:5</sup> This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.

<sup>1Jn 1:6</sup> If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.

<sup>1Jn 1:7</sup> 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, purifies us from all sin.

<sup>1Jn 1:8</sup> If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

<sup>1Jn 1:9</sup> If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

<sup>1Jn 1:10</sup> If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

8. John describes three aspects of our fellowship with Christ in verses 1:5-10. Each statement includes three parts, a conditional untruth "if we claim," the result of the lie, and a contrasting truth. Each of John's claims probably addressed teachings by false teachers.
- a. Verses 1:6-7 What is the false claim, the result, truth, and likely false teaching?
    - i. False claim? We claim to have fellowship with God but walk in darkness
    - ii. Result? **We lie to ourselves and do not live in truth (note we are not wrong on just one point – the truth is not in us)**
    - iii. Truth? **If we walk in the light as God is light, then we have fellowship with Christians, and Jesus' blood purifies our sins.**
    - iv. False teaching? Epicurean – we can indulge our senses and engage in any activity with our bodies because knowledge for our mind is the only thing of importance.
  - b. Verses 1:8-9
    - i. False claim? We claim to be without sin
    - ii. Result? **We lie to ourselves, and the truth is not in us (we are not wrong on just one point – the truth is not in us)**
    - iii. Truth? **If we confess our sins, Jesus will forgive us and purify us.**
    - iv. False Teaching? There is no sin, only ignorance and lack of enlightenment. The absence of sin was one of Gnosticism's significant tenants, so there was no need for Christ's sacrificial death as our Savior.
  - c. Verse 1:10
    - i. False claim? We claim not to sin
    - ii. Result? **We make God out to be a liar, and his word is not in us.**
    - iii. Truth? **If we confess our sins, Jesus will forgive us and purify us.**

iv. False Teaching? Perhaps the false teaching is that we work our way to righteousness through a perfect life. We should strive to live holy lives because this is pleasing to God. But we should not confuse our work to live holy lives with our salvation. Our salvation is through our faith in Christ and his purification of our sins.

9. John tells believers to walk in the light and not to sin but also to confess their sins. What does this tell you about what it means to walk with Jesus?

**We come to Jesus as sinners in need of grace and forgiveness. We need Christ's continual grace and mercy every day since we sin daily in our thoughts, actions, and inactions.**

### **Application**

10. What kind of false teaching have you confronted about Jesus?

**Friends and acquaintances - If Jesus existed, he was a wise teacher, his disciples made up the rest.**

**Gnosticism – two points of departure:**

- 1. Jesus, the man, is different from the Christ, a spirit**
- 2. The supernatural/spiritual world is the only true reality. The physical world is an expression of the spiritual realm.**

**Christian Science – Jesus was the first man to understand his identity as a spirit, empowering him to work miracles as we can.**

**Animism - worship of animal spirits**

**Hinduism- 500-300BC**

- 1. Polytheism**
- 2. Ethical/moral goals for human life, respect for all life**
- 3. Liberation from sorrow, suffering**
- 4. Past actions influence or determine how we live in the present (Karma)**
- 5. Existence of a soul and Reincarnation**
- 6. Perfect unselfishness, knowledge, and peace bring release and freedom to the soul to Nirvana.**

**Buddhism – life is the search for wisdom and enlightenment found within yourself. Pursue compassion, speak the truth, help others, and meditate to reach the highest state of well-being (nirvana)**

**Islam – Christianity is a polytheistic religion**

- a. Jesus is a prophet,**

- b. Gabriel revealed the truth to Mohammed, the greatest and last prophet**
- c. Quran was written after Mohammed's death in 672 AD**
- d. Allah is the one true God, the same God as Judaism and Christianity but imperfectly revealed in the Bible and Torah**
- e. Five pillars 1. Faith 2. Prayer 3. Alms 4. Pilgrimage to Mecca 5. Fasting**
- f. Ceremonial washing before prayer in the mosque, no pork, no alcohol.**

#### **Mormonism –**

- a. Founded by Joseph Smith**
- b. Four authoritative sources (KJV Bible, Book of Mormon, Book of Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price)**
- c. God attained supreme being by righteous living and persistent effort**
- d. Any human can become a god, as Jesus was a god**
- e. Salvation by faith and good works**
- f. Four kingdoms in the afterlife, where you end up depends on how you live**

#### **Dan Brown novels**

- a. The church is in charge of the greatest cover-up in history**
- b. Nothing is absolute or infallible; everyone can believe their own truth**
- c. Mary was not a virgin**
- d. Jesus and Mary Magdalene were lovers. She had a child, established a royal bloodline, and fled to France. Emperor Constantine suppressed the truth about Jesus and Mary.**

11. What teaching in 1 John 1 do you find most comforting at this stage of your walk with Christ?
- a. Jesus as the Word of life?
  - b. Fellowship with others, with Christ?
  - c. Joy as others come to Christ?
  - d. Confession of sins brings forgiveness and purification?

#### **Closing Prayer and Blessing**