

1 John 1 Notes

The Reality Of Jesus Christ (vss. 1-4)

- This letter is built around the repetition of three main themes: light vs. darkness, love vs. hatred, and truth vs. error. These three strands weave in and out of the letter. John makes five statements of purpose for the writing of his first epistle (1:3, 4; 2:1-2, 26; 5:13). In the first two chapters, John gives three tests of fellowship: obedience, truth, and love.
- The first four verses represent a single sentence in Greek. The reader is clearly pointed back to John 1:1. The gospel deals with the "personal word" of God's eternity and His entrance into time. This letter centers on the life heard and in turn proclaimed.
- This message is from the beginning because it is of God. It precedes creation, time, and history. But in God the message of life also draws near to humanity and finds its culmination in Jesus.
- The message is twofold. He states what has always been true about the gospel. His witness, unlike that of his opponents, represented neither innovation nor afterthought. Moreover, his witness was based on the immediate evidence of the senses. It is not a fabricated tale. The three verbs "seen," "bear witness," and "show" present personal experience, responsible affirmation, and authoritative announcement.
- Vs. 3 introduces the purpose of the letter. The Greek word rendered "fellowship" occurs here and in vs. 6. Synonyms include "communion," "participation," "sharing," and "partnership." Its root word means "common" or "shared" as opposed to one's own. The Greeks used this word to describe partners in business, joint owners of a piece of property, or shareholders in a common enterprise. In the New Testament, it refers to Christians who share a common faith (Philemon 6), who share possessions (Acts 2:44; 4:32), or who are partners in the gospel (Philippians 1:5). Oneness with God is what causes the oneness of faith.
- The reader's obedience will result in the completion of "joy" in John, and therefore also in them and in all other Christians. This joy is also mentioned in his gospel (John 15:11). The present joy among Christians is a token of the ultimate expression of joy, which depends on the final revelation of the Son at His second coming.

Conditions For Fellowship (1:5-2:2)

- Conformity of a standard (1:5-7).
 - To the degree that John was passionate in his love for the truth, he was equally passionate in his opposition to error. The message that

"God is light" needs to be compared with declarations elsewhere by John that "God is spirit" (John 4:24) and "God is love" (1 John 4:8). All three stress the immateriality and essence of God. Light emphasizes especially the splendor and glory of God, the truthfulness of God, and His purity (Psalm 27:1; 36:9). The "message," preached by John and the other apostles, was one they "heard from Him" and announced to their audience. Jesus is the perfect source of revelation.

- The description of God as light captures the essence of His nature and is foundational to the rest of the epistle. God and His glory are often described in terms of light (Exodus 13:21-22; 29-35; Psalm 104:1-2; Matthew 17:2; 2 Corinthians 4:4-6). God is light in the sense that He is life, and He is the source and sustainer of both physical and spiritual life.
- If people turn from the light or love darkness rather than light, it is because their deeds are evil (John 3:19-21). As darkness has no place in God (Exodus 15:11; 1 Samuel 2:2; Psalm 22:3; 48:10; 71:19; 98:2; Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8; 15:4), so all that is of the darkness is excluded from having fellowship with God.
- John points out that it is possible for people to say they are in the light, yet actually live in darkness. To "walk in darkness" (Romans 8:4; cf. Deuteronomy 10:12-13; Psalm 119:1; Micah 6:8; Romans 13:13; Ephesians 4:1; Colossians 1:10) is the same as "abiding" in darkness or "living in darkness," i.e., allowing darkness or sin to define one's life. In the final part of the verse, the author indicates that the test of truth is not necessarily one's belief, but also one's actions, deeds, and conduct.
- The positive test of knowing God is to live in the light as He Himself is in the light. John thus reiterates the fact that light is God's sphere. It is His nature, and He wills that it should become ours.
- One consequence of obeying the command to walk in the light is having fellowship with one another. "Fellowship" is not produced by us eating together; it is a spiritual relationship we enjoy because of what we have in common. A second consequence of walking in the light is that the blood of Jesus cleanses us from sin. The term "blood" is often used in the New Testament as a dramatic and graphic way to represent Christ's sacrificial death on the cross. We are cleansed when we come in contact with His blood, which is through baptism (Matthew 26:28; Acts 22:16).
- Confession of sin (1:8-10).
 - Whenever the principle of sin is denied as an ongoing reality, there follows a denial of responsibility for individual actions. When sin is

denied, truth as a principle in life cannot exist in us. It indicates someone in the depths of spiritual darkness and deception.

- Walking in the light is demonstrated not by the denial of sin but by confessing it and abandoning it. We can confess our sins to God and before other people fearlessly and in confidence because God is both faithful and just. God is faithful in Himself, i.e., to His own nature (2 Timothy 2:13), and faithful to His promise (Romans 3:25; 1 Corinthians 10:13; Hebrews 10:23; 11:11). God promises forgiveness to His children (Jeremiah 31:34; Micah 7:19-20), and in keeping this promise, God reveals His faithfulness and justice.
- The word "confess" means "to say the same thing." To confess sin means to say the same thing about it that God says. One acknowledges sin's reality and affirms that it is a transgression of His law and a violation of His will. A Christian does not have to make penance, make sacrifices, or punish themselves when they have sinned. Every sin is taken care of at the cross. The Christian who truly understands God's provision for a life of holiness does not want to deliberately disobey God.
- The word used for "forgive" has its roots in the cancellation of debts or the dismissal of charges. The word used for "cleanse" pictures an act of cleansing from the pollution of sin so that a new life of holiness may begin.
- The final statement, "his word is not in us," means that the word proclaimed, the tradition received, and the witness from the Old Testament scriptures have no place in the heart and conscience of those who deny their sin.