

1 JOHN

1:1-2:2

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Taught at our Sunday evening service, 3rd July 2022 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

Reading: 1 John 1:1-2:2

Good evening. Let's pray.

Introduction

Tonight we're starting a verse by verse study of 1st John, and over the next 5 weeks we'll cover roughly a chapter each time; tonight getting as far as chapter 2 verse 2.

- Author: John (the apostle)
- Length: 5 chapters, 105 verses, 2523 words
- Timing: Likely 53-54AD, though some estimate around 90AD
- Audience: All Christians, though quite possibly written to those in Ephesus
- Theme: God is light, God is love, God is life

As a quick reminder & overview, the apostle John was one of four writers of the New Testament who wrote more than 1 book, along with Luke (who wrote both his gospel and Acts), Peter (who wrote 2 letters, as well as being the source for much of Mark's gospel), and Paul (who wrote everything from Romans to Philemon, and I believe Hebrews too).

This letter is a relatively short book of the Bible at just 5 chapters long - approx. 2'500 words - written after he wrote the book of Revelation, despite being placed before it in the Bible, and likely written in 53-54AD (though some estimate around 90AD).

While it was written to all Christians - including you - its initial **audience** was quite possibly the Ephesians, and we'll come back to the significance of that in a moment.

Its **theme**, as summarised by many, is that God is light, God is love, and God is life - three descriptions John gives in this letter. And we'll dig into each of those as we study it.

As for **purpose** of the letter, John gives us 5 reasons why he wrote it, saying across 4 different verses "And these things we write to you that":

1. That you may have fellowship with other believers (1 John 1:3)
2. That your joy may be full (1 John 1:4)
3. That you may not sin (1 John 2:1)
4. That you may know that you have eternal life (1 John 5:13)
5. That you may *continue* to believe in the name of the Son of God (1 John 5:13)

The **topics** that John writes about (in order that we might have and know these things) include ones such as fellowship, sin, spiritual deception, prayer and Jesus' return. We'll see him write much about love, which is mentioned 33 times. And we'll also see him talk about things we can *know* - that verb is used 39 times in this letter. Indeed Christianity deals with certainty, not speculation, and from the opening verses we'll see the confidence with which John writes.

Now, coming back to the audience, I mentioned that it was likely that the initial audience was the Ephesian church, and the reason I think that is a credible option is that John later pastored this church that had been founded by Paul. Indeed, it seems he served many churches in the area based out of Ephesus. And as noted by J Vernon McGee:

The three epistles are called letters; yet the first epistle is not in the form or style of a letter. It has no salutation at its beginning nor greeting at its conclusion. Its style is more that of a sermon. It bears all the marks of a message from a devoted pastor who had a love and concern for a definite group of believers. John served as pastor of the church in Ephesus, which was founded by Paul.

J Vernon McGee

Why is this helpful to know? Well, J Vernon McGee, in his commentary on 1 John, goes on to point out that there were four factors that prevailed in Ephesus and the wider Roman world:

First, Christianity had become familiar - at least 20 years had passed since the resurrection, and while they were holding fast to good things, and couldn't bear those who are evil, we know from Jesus' rebuke in Revelation chapter 2, that the Ephesian church had lost their first love.

Second, he states that the high standards of Christianity made the Christians different, and the children and even grandchildren of the first Christians did not want to be different, leading to a moving away from Biblical standards.

Third, the danger to the Ephesian church was not persecution from the outside but seduction from the inside. Hopefully you may recall how Paul warned the Ephesian elders in Acts 20 saying "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves."

And fourth, and key to this, is that Gnosticism was the real enemy of Christianity, and, he concludes, it still is. Gnosticism was essentially the belief that matter or material was essentially evil - only the spirit was good. The same principle is in modern liberalism which maintains that there is a spark of good in everyone and that each person is to develop that spark of good.

Where this led to was a denial that Jesus was both God and man, since God could not unite himself with an evil body. So some taught that Jesus only appeared to have a body, yet in reality, didn't - to the extent that when He walked He didn't leave any footprints. Other teachings emerged to say that Jesus divinity came upon Him at His baptism and left Him at the cross. And all of them denied that Jesus was the Messiah.

Chuck Smith notes that Gnosticism was further developed to deny the deity of Christ, claiming that He was only a created being - which is the basis of what Jehovah's Witnesses believe.

With that context, it makes sense why John builds such a case for the things he had seen first hand - that Jesus was a real person, with a real body, and that He was God. And it makes sense why he so clearly says any teaching contrary to that is false.

Overview of 1 John

So then, following that context, let's take a quick look at how the chapters break down:

- Chapter 1 - A real Jesus and restored relationship with God who is light
- Chapter 2 - We know that we know Him, but should walk our talk, and avoid deceptions
- Chapter 3 - We are children of God, and should abide in Him, and love others that do
- Chapter 4 - Be careful what you listen to, and love one another for God is love
- Chapter 5 - Obedience to Christ should follow the certainty of what has been done for us

Overview of chapter one

Zooming in a little, in chapter 1 we see

- v1-4 - A real Jesus (rebuttal to Gnosticism)
- v5-10 - Fellowship with God and one another (through a restored relationship with God)

And that extends into the first 2 verses of chapter 2, which is why we'll cover those this evening too.

Chapter one

So digging into chapter 1, I want to begin by talking about John because it's easy to forget all he had seen...

He was a disciple of Jesus, the one he describes in his gospel as the disciple whom Jesus loved, and he was a son of Zebedee and brother of James - with whom he was called the "Son's of Thunder". He was part of Jesus inner circle of disciples; Peter, Andrew, James and John - and ended up as both the last living apostle and the only one who wasn't martyred for Christ.

He was there as Peter's mother-in-law was healed, and at the raising of Jairus' daughter. He was there at the two catches of fish, and the transfiguration of Jesus (along with Peter and James). He was present with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, and had seen the trial of Jesus in front of the high priest. He was there at the cross, and was the disciple whom Jesus entrusted Mary to (which makes sense of his second letter to the elect lady being to her). He saw and entered the empty tomb along with Peter, there in the upper room, and there at the shore of Galilee as Jesus showed Himself again for the 3rd time after His resurrection.

Indeed, he had seen so much of Jesus' earthly life that he wrote at the end of his gospel "And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen."

So no wonder John could write this introduction...

1 John 1:1

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—

He **knew** Jesus!

And he knew that this was no mere man. He was God. And he writes here how Jesus was present at the beginning, just as he did at the start of his gospel:

John 1:1-5

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

John knew first hand that Jesus wasn't some sort of phantom or vision, and in these opening verses slams this evidence in the face of the Gnostics who denied Jesus had a body or that He was both God and man. John had lived alongside Jesus on a daily basis for 3 years. He'd seen His miracles, and heard His teaching. He was the one who laid back on Jesus as they were sat at the last supper to ask Him "Lord, who is it?" with regard to who would betray Him.

And he continues...

1 John 1:2

the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—

He was confirming that this wasn't just a regular guy. This was Jesus, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. Present from Creation. And will reign forever. Yet was also manifested to us as a real man that the disciples had seen with their eyes. And he says...

1 John 1:3

that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

John could not make it clearer that this was a real and tangible experience. Just look at these verses again...

1 John 1:1

That which was from the beginning, which we have **heard**, which we have **seen** with our eyes, which we have **looked upon**, and our hands have **handled**, concerning the Word of life—

1 John 1:2

the life was **manifested**, and we have **seen**, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was **manifested** to us—

1 John 1:3

that which we have **seen** and **heard** we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

This is a complete rebuttal to the Gnostics.

But what happened as a result of this experience? He and the disciples declared what they had witnessed, that we may believe too. They obeyed the great commission. They recognised that the gospel isn't a treasure to be hoarded, but a gift to be shared *that* we might have fellowship, not only with other believers, but critically with the Father and Son too.

So let's talk about fellowship for a moment. After all, this church is called Deal Christian Fellowship.

Fellowship with each other is not socialising. It's not talking about the weather, or how well work is going, or whether we have holidays planned. The original Greek word here, *koinōnia*, means "having in common or sharing with". And so true Christian fellowship is meeting together and sharing things of Christ. To talk about Jesus and His Word. To talk about what the Lord has done, what He's doing, and what He's going to do. It's sharing in the joy of a common love for our Saviour. It's like that moment where you talk to a stranger, realise you have a friend in common - and instantly talk about them.

So, how many conversations did you have about the Lord or His Word after Sheer Praise last night? If it was zero, you didn't have fellowship - you had conversations, you passed the time, but again, it wasn't fellowship. And I think we would do well to pursue real fellowship with each other more often.

And when we gather to do that, we can take assurance of Jesus words "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them." - that's fellowship right there!

And fellowship with God is what we were made for, so John writes:

1 John 1:4

And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.

Lacking in joy? Well, we need to read this! If what we think we need for our joy to be full, isn't found in this letter, we've got something wrong! For there is a much bigger picture than our circumstances.

We can have fellowship with our Creator, our Heavenly Father, our Saviour. What a joy that should be to us. It's the most incredible thing that could happen to us, yet at first glance we have a problem for we read in verse 5:

1 John 1:5

This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.

God is light. As such there is no shadow of turning. No wickedness, no deceit. He is truthful and faithful. He doesn't get out of the wrong side of bed for He neither slumbers or sleeps. He's patient. He is love, and everything is characterised by that.

So imagine if the opposite were true! That He was darkness, or changed his mind, was wicked, deceitful, spoke lies or was unfaithful. That he had bad days, was impatient, was unloving - or even cold toward us. This is an incredible reason why we can sleep at night... or is it?

The very goodness of God should be both comforting and frightening to us. People expect God's goodness will save them. But they often expect it will save them because he'll let them off. However, if He did that, He wouldn't be good. So we have a problem. Because light reveals. It reveals dust, dirt, and all sorts of things. Yes, through it we see beauty, but also corruption. Both are amplified as they are revealed. And the light of God reveals the darkness of our hearts, and those of all around us, which Jeremiah describes as deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.

The good news is that Jesus *has* saved us, if indeed we are Christians - if we have acknowledged our sin, repented of it, and put our faith in Jesus as our Saviour. But John, writing to Christian's here, is causing us to question if we really do have *fellowship* with Him. He says next:

1 John 1:6

If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

Since God doesn't change and doesn't walk in darkness, we simply cannot say we are fellowshiping with Him if we are walking in darkness. In other words, if you say you're a Christian, but live like the world - you're a liar, a hypocrite, even the reason why some people never become Christians. So serious is that, that you should examine yourself to see if you are indeed a Christian, or are just pretending to be one.

However, we read that the opposite is true for the Christian who walks right...

1 John 1:7

But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

If we walk as Jesus would have us do, in obedience to His commandments, then we have fellowship with Him. And we are recipients of His grace! Is this earning salvation? No! But it stating that how we walk affects our relationships with Him. Yet, even when we fail, John is noting that Jesus sacrifice on the cross is sufficient to pay for all our sin... past, present and future!

So does that mean we can continue to sin, knowing we'll be forgiven? No, that's not what we should be doing. Paul wrote in Romans...

Romans 6:1-2

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?

Why would continuing to sin be a problem? Well first, even though you would be free from the penalty of sin, you would not be free from the consequence of it.

But second, and again what John is writing about here, is that sin in your life will affect your walk with God. That is, if you walk in darkness, if you continue in sin, you are not fellowshiping with God!

But, perhaps you, or someone you know, may say "I don't sin". Well, John writes...

1 John 1:8

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

If we you say you have no sin, then the only person you deceive is you. God is not fooled, neither is your spouse, your friends, or your colleagues! And John calls us to recognise that if we truly believe we have never sinned, then we are not Christian's - because a Christian is someone who believes Jesus died for their sin.

But what do when we recognise not only that we *have* sinned, but that we *do* sin? We read...

1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Wow. What a relief, that when we confess our sin to Him, that He doesn't say - "sorry, you've really blown it this time!" - because even once we are saved, we will sin. Yet Jesus is faithful and just to forgive us - because justice has already been carried out with him paying for all our sin. That's humbling.

So what does it mean to confess our sin? The word confess is from the Greek verb *homologeō*, meaning "to say the same thing." *Logeō* means "to say" and *homo* means "the same." You are to say the same thing that God says. In other words, to see our sin as God sees it and acknowledge it to Him. Because when we do, not only will He forgive us, but he'll clean and clothe us - just like you can imagine the father of the prodigal son did when his son returned from the pigpen. Confession restores our walk, our fellowship with the Father. He never stopped being our Father, but now we are fellowshiping with Him again.

Now, so important is our recognition that sin is sin, that he says again...

1 John 1:10

If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us

That is, you can't say you're a Christian and that you've never sinned. To do so would only show that you have no clue what a Christian is and why anyone needs saving in the first place.

And now, John gives us the second reason he writes these things...

1 John 2:1

My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

That is, knowing that our sin cost Jesus so much (v7), we should never want to sin again! The blood of Jesus should be a constant reminder of how much our sin cost.

Charles Spurgeon said:

I cannot trifle with the evil that killed my best Friend. I must be holy for his sake. How can I live in sin when He has died to save me from it?

Charles Spurgeon

Yet, knowing our wretched condition John says if anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father - Jesus, our righteous Saviour!

Pulling this together, JVM says:

Many Christians are living lives in which they are constantly disobeying God, yet they wonder why they aren't having fellowship with Him. They need to recognize that sin causes a break in fellowship.

J Vernon McGee

However, he adds:

They need to know that they have not lost their salvation, because in the next breath John adds, "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." Notice that John says, "We have an advocate with the Father"—John doesn't call Him by the impersonal name God because He is still our Father even though we have sinned.

J Vernon McGee

And with such a comfort, John writes this final verse we'll look at this evening...

1 John 2:2

And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

Jesus, and not ourselves, is the one who pays in full for our sin. His propitiation is to appease, to make peace with God by dying in our place. And not just for us, but for the whole world. This rules out the false doctrine of limited atonement that suggests Jesus only died for Christians.

Again, we read here that He died for everyone. Whether everyone accepts it is another matter. And sadly, we know that many will not, hence there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Jesus will say to some "I never knew you".

Rejection of Jesus' salvation is ultimately the decision that will send people to hell.

So what a good God we have that He made A way! For everyone. That means we should never give up sharing the gospel.

Take Alan for an example - he came to know the Lord just recently having had family praying for him for years!

Another example; a friend I had as a teenager seemed so close to becoming a Christian, but didn't despite me and some friends praying together for her. Yet, 10 years later, I found out that she had gone to uni, met a Christian friend there and become a Christian - and was so on fire for the Lord!

Then Siân's grandad who became a Christian in his final years after his wife prayed for him for 30 years! We must not give up on anyone, for Jesus died for them.

Application questions

As we close this evening, let me ask you 3 questions...

- Are you walking in the light? Do you have any fellowship with God?
- Do you truly fellowship with other believers?
- Have you confessed your sin? Do you see it as God sees it?

Let's pray.