

An In-Depth Study of the First Letter of Apostle John

[Part 1]

The letters written by the apostle John are of the greatest importance, for the light they shed on the thought and theology of the New Testament and the administration of the early Church.

These letters also show the heresies and misguided thinking which came from within the early Church itself, and can also be found in every generation of the Church now worldwide.

I hope and pray that these study articles may show how valuable and relevant these letters are for present Christianity.

This first letter of the apostle John is more like a loving and anxious sermon than a letter, as it does **not** contain an opening address and a closing greeting as the apostle Paul's letters.

The first letter was written around AD100 and was written in Ephesus.

By this time we have second and even third generation Christians and much of the thrill of the first years of the Church had faded.

The Church was becoming traditional, half-hearted and was lost, as it can be today.

Revelation 2:4 [NIV] *“Yet I hold this against you: **You have forsaken your first love.**”*

The message given to the Church at Ephesus by Jesus Christ, through the apostle John, vividly illustrates lethargic situation in the early Church and must be a warning for the Church in this generation.

John 15:19 [NIV] *“If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. **As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.**”*

Every Christian in every generation must realise and accept this fact.

John 17:14 [NIV] *“I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for **they are not of the world any more than I am of the world.**”*

Every generation of Christians must look to the words of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit inspired writings of the apostles as the standard by which we live.

These recorded words demand a new standard of moral purity, a new sexual ethic, a new kindness and compassion, a new service of others and a new forgiveness of other human beings who bring us pain and hurt us.

Such a dramatic change of lifestyle is **not** easy, it demands the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit in every individual person called to become a Christian.

Once the first thrill of our calling and the revelation of the very purpose for our existence wears off, life as a Christian becomes a daily battle against the society who do **not** yet know their Creator God and Satan whose only desire is to destroy our potential to become created children of the one and only Creator God.

There is **no** indication that the church was being persecuted at the time this letter was written, the problem was seduction from within the Church.

Matthew 24:10-12 [NIV] *“At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and **many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.** Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold,”*

Jesus Christ warned that this can happen in every generation.

The problem that the apostle John seeks to combat in this first letter came from people who thought that what they preached was “*improving*” Christian faith, by making it more intellectual and respectable by world standards.

The same problem is found in the Church today, when some wish to express Christianity in terms of current philosophical ideas generated in a society that is **not** based on the words and standards that are recorded in God’s Word, the Christian Bible.

A study of this letter will confirm us in the true faith and give us a defence against these false preachers who would seduce us away from Jesus Christ as central to our hope and faith.

1 John 1:1-4 [NIV] *“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. 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. **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. We write this to make our joy complete.”*

The apostle John opens this letter with a powerful statement, “*I’ve known your Saviour Jesus Christ personally.*”

John could at this time be the only living apostle who could make this statement.

This personal experience adds great weight to what the apostle John is about to teach.

This was **not** second or third hand knowledge that the apostle John was expounding.

Through the personal experience that the apostle John had with Jesus Christ we also can build a personal relationship with Jesus and God the Father.

This personal relationship was intended to bring us joy in every aspect of our life, as it had in the life of the apostle John.

This fellowship that the apostle John is seeking that all Christians should have is based on three principles:

- a) This fellowship must be grounded on God’s Word the Christian Bible. Without this foundation any true fellowship is impossible.
- b) This fellowship must depend on unity within the gathering of Christians and their daily interaction.
- c) This fellowship must be renewed in each individual by the indwelling and influence of the Holy Spirit.

Only then can the social and spiritual interaction be possible by each having a personal living relationship with Jesus Christ.

The aim of every true Christian preacher is to awaken godly sorrow in every person who hears their message, that will lead to true repentance.

Only then can the joy of our forgiveness through the life, death and resurrection of our living Saviour bring joy to our fellowship.

The apostle John's message in this letter is first and foremost about Jesus Christ, as all preaching should be in every generation.

The apostle John reminds us about three great things we must accept about Jesus Christ:

a) **Jesus Christ had no beginning**

John 1:1-2 [NIV] *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.”*

Jesus Christ was eternity entering into time, in which every human being exists.

The eternal God was entering into the world of human beings.

b) **Jesus Christ took on real human life**

Jesus Christ could be physically seen and touched.

Philippians 2:5-7 [NIV] *“Your attitude should be the same as that of **Christ Jesus**: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but **made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.**”*

Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, was a human being who could feel physical pain and who bled when cut.

Note that Jesus Christ, who was God, willingly took on Himself to become a very limited being, because of the great love and compassion he had for all humanity. [**John 3:16**]

c) **Through this selfless action the Word came into human life**

The Word is life, eternal life.

It is the Word which can change death into life.

Always remember that when scripture refers to “*the Word of God*” it has more than one meaning.

1) **It refers to Jesus Christ personally**

John 1:1, 14 [NIV] *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” ... “**The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.**”*

2) **It refers to all Holy Spirit inspired words that we find in the Christian Bible**

2 Timothy 3:16-17 [NIV] *“**All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.**”*

3) **It refers specifically to the gospel message, as preached by the church**

Acts 4:1-4 [NIV] *“**The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. They seized***

Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand.”

Philippians 1:14 [NIV] *“Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.”*

1 Thessalonians 2:13 [NIV] *“And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.”*

1 John 1:5 [NIV] *“This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: **God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.**”*

The apostle John refers to major principles in this statement.

a) The gospel message which was brought to humanity by Jesus Christ, the Word of God.

Isaiah 9:2, 6-7 [NIV] *“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.” ... “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and for ever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.”*

Before the entry of Jesus Christ into the human world the vast majority of humans were walking in darkness, not knowing the very reason for their existence.

Genesis 1:26-27 [NIV] *“Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”*

God’s plan for all humanity was to have created children in His “*image*” [shadow or physical resemblance] and “*likeness*” [same manner or character].

This plan started with the “*image*” and was then intended to progress to “*likeness*” through an intimate relationship with humanity.

Genesis 2:8-9 [NIV] *“Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground, trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. **In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.**”*

The two trees are symbolic of the pathway and goal for humanity to become a created child of God.

The “*tree of life*” was symbolic of the goal God sets for every human being, eternal life in the kingdom or created family of God.

The “*tree of the knowledge of good and evil*” was the only way humans can attain this goal set before them.

Proverbs 14:12 [NIV] *“There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.”*

To eat of this “*tree of the knowledge of good and evil*” seems to be the logical way to gain the goal set before us, but ends in death.

Human beings do not have the capacity to know what is truly good or evil.

Only obedience to God and His Word can illuminate what is good and what is evil.

John 14:6 [NIV] *“Jesus answered, **“I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me.”**”*

Jesus Christ is the **only** “way” to eventually be given access to the “tree of life.”

John 8:12 [NIV] *“When **Jesus spoke again** to the people, he said, **“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”**”*

Jesus Christ, the Word, is the light that will bring us out of the darkness of ignorance as to why we exist.

God’s Word, and obedience to what it tells us, is the **only** way we can even know what is good or evil in the eyes of our Creator God.

Genesis 2:15-17 [NIV] *“The **LORD God** took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the **LORD God** commanded the man, **“You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.”**”*

God gave Adam, and hence all of humanity, a test commandment to see if we will obey our Creator God or not.

Genesis 3:1-3 [NIV] *“Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the **LORD God** had made. He said to the woman, **“Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?”** The woman said to the serpent, **“We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”**”*

Adam had told Eve about this “tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”

Genesis 3:4-7 [NIV] *“**You will not surely die,**” the serpent said to the woman. **“For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”** When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realised that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.”*

The serpent [Satan – **Revelation 12:9**] placed doubt into the mind of Eve as to the truth of the Words of God.

Both Eve and Adam fell into Satan’s trap, and their rebellious nature was exposed.

What was the end result of this failure to obey their Creator God?

Genesis 3:22-24 [NIV] *“And the **LORD God** said, **“The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live for ever.”** So the **LORD God** banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. **After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.”**”*

Access to the “tree of life” was taken away from humanity.

I believe that the animal killed to provide the covering garment that God made for Adam and Eve was a lamb, symbolic of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, [**Revelation 13:8**] who had already decided to be the **only** Saviour of all humanity, who in rebellion and sin only deserve death.

Jesus Christ came into the human world to illuminate this saving of humanity from their own rebellious nature and the way we can take on the “likeness” of our Creator who will lead us back to the “tree of life”.

1 John 1:6-7 [NIV] *“If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. 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.”*

If we do **not** accept the Word of God, the Christian Bible, we continue to walk in darkness, and have no fellowship with our Creator God.

If we do **not** live by the truth [**John 14:6**] the words of Jesus Christ, as recorded in the Christian Bible, we continue to walk in darkness.

If we live by the truth then the blood of our Saviour will purify us from the death penalty the sins brings with it [**Romans 6:23**].

1 John 1:8-10 [NIV] *“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.”*

Scripture tells us that all humans have sinned [**Romans 3:23**] and failed then to receive the glory of eternal life from our Creator God.

If we claim we have **not** sinned the “truth”, God’s Word is **not** guiding our mind and human spirit [see **verse 6** and **Job 32:8**].

If we confess our sinful nature to our Creator God then His great love for us will cause Him to forgive us and Jesus Christ’s sacrifice will become a substitute for our deserved death.

If we reject God’s Word, the Christian Bible, that records the words of Jesus Christ, we are telling our Creator God that His Word **cannot** be trusted.

Doing this places us under the power of Satan who injected the same doubt in the minds of Eve and Adam.

They both died spiritually, walked into the darkness of Satan’s deception and eventually died physically.

They now await the resurrection back to human life after Christ’s return to this earth. [**Revelation 20:11-15**]

Only at this future resurrection will the truth of God, the Christian Bible, be opened up to Adam and Eve, as well as all whom Satan has deceived down through the history of humanity. [See **Revelation 12:9**]

Then with the gift of the Holy Spirit for all who decide to obey their Creator God [**Acts 5:32**] the vast majority of humanity will accept Jesus Christ as their Saviour [**2 Peter 3:9**].