

REAL FAITH

8 studies in 1 John

	Title	Passage	Sermon	Study
1	Believe and live	Study 1: 1 John 1:1-4	Apr 25	Apr 26-1
2	Walk in the light	Study 2: 1 John 1:5-2:2	May 2	May 3-8
3	Love and live	Study 3: 1 John 2:3-17	May 9	May 10-15
4	Don't be deceived	Study 4: 1 John 2:18-27	May 16	May 17-22
5	You take after your Father	Study 5: 1 John 2:28-3:10	May 23	May 24-29
6	The gospel teaches us love	Study 6: 1 John 3:11-24	May 30	May 31-5
7	Don't believe every spirit	Study 7: 1 John 4:1-6	Jun 6	Jun 7-12
8	Have love... and life	Study 8: 1 John 4:7-5:21	Jun 13	Jun 14-19

Real faith

There is lots of discussion in academia about the background issues going on at the time 1 John was written. People have tried to pinpoint the heresies the letter was dealing with by looking through different ancient Christian literature from around the time. The truth is, we can't say specifically (although many have tried) what heresy or heretic the letter was written to deal with.

What we can say is, it was written to churches, most likely by the apostle John the author of the 4th gospel, after his gospel was written to clear up some issues that had arisen in the church. Some people who were part of the church seemed to have gone out from the church (2:19) and they were believing and teaching that Jesus wasn't always God the Son. We can't say specifically what they were teaching, but it seems like they didn't like the idea that God came into the world through the immaculate conception as human flesh and they didn't like the idea that God the Son would be crucified in human flesh as a sacrifice for human sin.

There was a pattern of teaching around the world during the first and second centuries that kind of grew from Plato's teaching that was called Gnosticism (I call them the 'snot sticks'). One of the ideas from this pool of thought was that the spiritual/divine couldn't really engage with the physical, they were just different realms. It was possible that a little spark—like an ember cracking and flying out of a fire—could come out of the divine for a while into the physical, but it would only ever be a spark and only temporary—because the physical and divine were separate. There were lots of heresies that grew out of this. One was that Jesus wasn't born divine, but the divine 'spark' came on him at baptism and left him on the cross. It would seem like the churches that John was writing to may have been being told this.

If the physical is so below the divine, the other thing that grows out of that is the idea that it doesn't matter what you do with your physical body. They taught things like, the moment you believed you somehow entered the divine realm and so became sinless and so it didn't matter how you conducted yourself physically because you were without sin. Things like hating your brother, sexual immorality, drunkenness—they belong to the physical, not to the sinless divine, so go for it!

This weird teaching was swirling around and unsettling the believers in the early church. Were they really Christian if they believed God the Son came in the flesh at the virgin birth? Were they really Christian if they believed that God the Son had lay down his life for them on the cross, that he was buried? Did it really matter how they lived after all? Was it really important how they lived in the world if by believing in the divine spark they could be instantly deemed sinless?

Was their faith genuine or were they being conned? Did it really matter how they lived? Was their faith in God becoming a man to redeem humanity to a physical eternal future with God well founded?

We live in a different context. But, we've asked ourselves those questions. Is this idea of the 'out there' God coming 'in here' as an ordinary human being legit? Do we really need to take that literally? Does it really matter how we live? Is my future really secure if my faith is in Christ?

To all these questions, John writes this letter. He writes to give us assurance. He tells us this is his purpose as he concludes his letter:

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life

(1 John 5:13)

If you would love to be assured of your faith and your life in Christ, this is a worthwhile letter for you! I know I want to be assured of my faith and the life I have in Christ. I pray that deeper assurance would be the fruit for all of us this term as we spend time together in 1 John.

1

Believe and live

Warm-up

Think of the 10 people you're closest to (relationally). How many of them believe in Jesus?

Investigate

Read 1 John 1:1

1. John starts his letter off with 'That which was from the beginning'. Have a look at Genesis 1:1 and John 1:1-2 and John 15:27. Who/what is John talking about here?

2. What does John emphasize about his experience of 'That which was from the beginning'?

The 'word of life' is most likely a reference to both the eternal Son of God (Jesus) and the message about the eternal Son of God (the gospel). In the New International Version (NIV) the Word of life is capitalized. The capitalizing of the Word has the implication that the translators of the NIV think it is referring to the eternal Son of God, the same as in chapter 1 verse 1 of John's gospel (In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God). The English Standard Version (ESV) on the other hand doesn't capitalize the word of life. This implies that for these translators the word is both a reference to Jesus, the eternal Son of God, and also, the message about Jesus. John is wanting to ensure his readers know that the person of the Son of God has come in the flesh to bring the good news of eternal life.

Read 1 John 1:2

3. Again, John emphasizes that he (and others) have physically witnessed Jesus. He calls him 'the eternal life, that was with the Father and has appeared to us'. What does he mean when he says Jesus is 'the eternal life'? See John 17:5 and 17:24 to help with your answer.

4. When John says, 'We proclaim to you the eternal life', what is it—in your own words—that he is proclaiming?

Read 1 John 1:3

5. After again emphasizing that he has physically witnessed 'the eternal life', John tells his readers that he proclaims 'the eternal life' so that they may have fellowship with him and the other eyewitnesses. What kind of fellowship do you think John means? John 17:20-26 should help with your answer.

Read 1 John 1:4

6. What do we learn here about how important it is to John for people to believe the truth about Jesus?

Apply

7. John seems to really stress that he witnessed the physical appearing of the eternal Son of God in these verses. Why do you think it is so important for Christians to believe that the Son of God took on real human flesh and dwelled among us, rather than him coming as say a spirit or some other kind of un-human form?

8. John says there is a lot to gain from believing the message about Jesus, God's Son coming in the flesh. He says there is eternal fellowship with God on offer. How easy is it for you to forget that being a Christian holds out the promise of eternal life? What can you do to make this a more present thought in your day to day life this week?

9. John finds great joy in people believing the truth about Jesus and coming to share in eternal life with him. How would you feel if a family member, a friend, a colleague came to believe in Jesus? What are some practical steps you can take to proclaim this truth to them?

Pray

2

Walk in the light

Warm-up

Describe a time when you've enjoyed the sun's warmth on a winter's day.

Investigate

Read 1 John 1:5-7

1. In verse 5 John says that God is light, in him there is no darkness at all. What does the Bible have to say about light and darkness in the following passages:

Genesis 1:1-3

Proverbs 4:19

Isaiah 9:2-6

Matthew 5:14-16

John 3:19

John 8:12

2. To walk in the darkness is to deny the truth about Jesus and to not live his way. What does John say here about those who walk in the darkness?

3. What are the two outcomes of 'walking in the light' (i.e. believing the truth about Jesus and living his way)?

4. What is it that purifies us from all sin (see Leviticus 17:11)?

Read 1 John 1:8-10

5. What are the consequences of:

- Claiming to be without sin?

- Confessing our sins?

Read 1 John 2:1-2

6. John says he is writing this to them so that they do not sin. The people going on sinning is not one of the desired outcomes of John's message of forgiveness! But, what if we do sin?

7. An 'atoning' sacrifice is a sacrifice that covers over sin. Who is Jesus' atoning sacrifice sufficient for? What doesn't he mean by this (particularly in light of 1:6 and 1:8)?

Apply

8. In what ways in your life are you walking in the light? In what ways are you walking in the darkness?

9. What is good about confessing your sins to your Father in heaven? How can you get better at doing this?

10. If what John's telling us here is true, there is forgiveness on offer to the whole world through the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. Think of some of the people in your life who don't believe this good news. What are some steps you can take to help them to hear and believe it?

Pray

Warm-up

What do you think people outside church would say is a tell-tale sign of a Christian?

Investigate**Read 1 John 2:3-6**

1. One of John's primary concerns in writing his letter was the people who had gone out from the church (1 John 2:18-19) who were falsely teaching things like Jesus did not come in the flesh. In light of this, these false teachers taught if we believe in Jesus, what we do in the flesh in terms of our obedience doesn't really matter (only spiritual things matter). What does John say here about the importance of obedience for Christians?

2. What assurance/reassurance does this passage offer to those of us who are trying to obey Jesus commands?

Read 1 John 2:7-8

3. In what way is John's command 'to walk as Jesus did' an old command?

4. In what living and breathing way is the command to 'walk as Jesus did' being revealed anew?

Read 1 John 2:9-11

5. John offers up a concrete piece of assurance to believers here. What is a sure sign that we live in the light according to these verses?

Read 1 John 2:12-14

6. The people John is writing to need assurance that the gospel they originally believed is still true, contrary to what those who have gone out from them are saying. Describe how these verses might give confidence to John's readers?

Read 1 John 2:15-17

7. God is a God of love. In v 10 John told his readers that love for their brother was a sure sign they lived in the light. Quite famously, in John 3:16, Jesus said 'for God so loved the world he sent his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall never die but have eternal life'. Here John says if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. What does he mean by this?

8. What kind of behaviour should we see in our lives that can give us confidence that we will live forever?

Apply

9. Last term as we looked at the sermon on the mount, we heard the good news that through Jesus' death and resurrection the kingdom of heaven now belongs to the poor in Spirit. We just need to come to Jesus like a little child and the kingdom of heaven belongs to us. But, we also saw that Jesus didn't save us in order for us to go on sinning, but in order that we would be salt and light to the world (Matthew 5:13-15). Discuss how important obedience is for believers.

11. John has already made it clear that none of us are perfect (1 John 1:8). We are only saved by believing in Jesus. But our obedience matters! Discuss how we might be able to find assurance of our standing with God from our obedience—without falling into the trap of thinking we have earned our way into heaven.

Pray

4

Don't be deceived

Warm-up

What are some of the 'un-orthodox' things people believe about Jesus in the world today?

Investigate

Read 1 John 2:18-19

1. By 'the last hour' John means the time before the second coming of Christ. It is not a literal sixty minute period—it is a metaphorical way of saying that, in the scheme of eternity, Jesus' return is soon. According to Colin Kruse's Pillar New Testament Bible Commentary, the term 'antichrist' is only found in John's letters in the New Testament. Jesus talked about 'false' Christs appearing in the last days (Matt 24:24; Mark 13:22). It is likely when John says 'you have heard that the antichrist is coming', that he is referring to Jesus' teaching about 'false Christs'. Who does John say these antichrists are that have come?

Read 1 John 2:20-23

2. John tells his readers they have 'an anointing from the Holy One' in verse 20 which is inseparably coupled with a knowledge of the truth. What is this anointing that he is talking about (see John 14:23-27)?

3. What are the plain and simple differences between the antichrist/s John is warning about and the people that he is writing to?

4. John clearly defines who the antichrist is in verse 22. Who does he say is the antichrist?

Read John 2:24-25

5. What will be the key to John's readers remaining in the Son?

Read John 2:26-27

6. There's a real 'us' and 'them' tone in these verses. This is important for understanding John. John is not trying to rebuke his readers, he is trying to assure them of their eternal life in the gospel they first received. He is trying to point out the heresy of 'them'. What do John's readers 'not need anyone to teach' and what teaching do they need (see also Ephesians 6:17)?

Apply

7. How can we recognise antichrists today?

8. What practical things can we be doing to ensure that 'what we have heard from the beginning remains in' us?

9. We have so many different messages communicated to us each day on so many different media platforms. We have to find a way to ensure the message we remain in is the truth about Jesus Christ. Share with one another your strategy for reading the Bible this week.

Pray

5

You take after your Father

Warm-up

In what sense if any do you take after your parent/s?

Investigate

Read 1 John 2:28-29

1. If God is righteous, what will be the flow on effect to those born of him?

Read 1 John 3:1-3

2. What is the great love that the Father has lavished on us? John 1:11-13 may help with your answer.

3. When John says ‘the world does not know us’ he means that the world doesn’t understand our identity as children of God. Why doesn’t the world know us?

4. There are lots of things we do not know about the future, but what is one thing we can be sure of according to verse 2?

5. How should knowing we will one day be like Christ change us today?

Read 1 John 3:4-6

6. What comfort do these verses offer to sinners?

John is not saying Christians are perfect in verse 6—that would contradict what he said in 1 John 1:8. One day we will be perfect (1 John 3:2). What he is saying is those who live in Christ, are no longer characterized by sinning. We are trying to purify ourselves like Jesus is pure.

Read 1 John 3:7-10

7. It sounds like people have been trying to lead John's readers astray. What false teaching does this passage suggest they may have been receiving?

8. What does Jesus say in this passage about those who go on sinning?

9. How do we know the difference between the children of God and the children of the devil?

Apply

10. Do you feel it is a privilege for you to be a child of God? Why or why not?

11. Since you have been Christian, what are some of the ways you have been trying to purify yourself from sin? What is this a sign of?

12. We are not yet purified like Christ, our sin has been taken away, but the day of perfection is yet to come. How can we help ourselves and each other remain in Christ and do what is right until that day?

Pray

6

The gospel teaches us love

Warm-up

What makes you feel loved?

Investigate

Read 1 John 3:11-15

1. What is the message John's readers have heard from the beginning?
2. We are not to be like Cain. What do we learn about Cain here?
3. How might Cain's hatred of his brother reflect the world's hatred of believers?
4. John draws a very clear line in the sand in verses 14 and 15. What does he say is a fundamental characteristic of a child of God here (and in 2:9-11 and in 3:10)?

Read 1 John 3:16-20

5. There has been a lot of emphasis on loving our brothers and sisters. How do believers know what it looks like to love?
6. What practical explanation of love does John give us here?

7. How, or by doing what, will we be reassured that we belong to the truth?

Read 1 John 3:21-24

8. What commands does John say we need to obey to have confidence before God?

9. In an earlier study we looked at the fact that Jesus left his Spirit to those who love him (John 14:15-18). What does the Spirit mean for believers according to 1 John 3:24?

Apply

10. Share how you have experienced the kind of love this passage is talking about in your life.

11. In what ways might you need to repent of being like Cain?

12. How can you practically and sacrificially offer up your material possessions to love your brothers and sisters?

Pray

7

Don't believe every spirit

warm-up

Has someone ever 'spoken a word from the Lord' over you? What does that even mean?

Investigate

Read 1 John 4:1-3

1. Many Christians have claimed to have a 'word from the Lord' through Christian history. How, in verse 1, does John say his readers should receive these words from the Lord/spirits?

2. How can we recognize that something has come from the Spirit of God?

3. If a message being brought to us is not from the Spirit of God, where does John say it has come from (see note in question 1 study 4 for more info on the antichrist)?

Read 1 John 4:4-6

4. How does John say, in verse 4, that his readers have overcome the spirits of the antichrist (i.e. those who went out from them that are denying Jesus is both fully human and fully God—see 2:19 and 22)? What does he mean by this?

5. What is a characteristic of the messengers/messages brought by the spirits of the antichrist?

6. John (and his fellow eyewitnesses) claims to be 'from God' in verse 6. What do you think he means by this?

7. John is not concerned that the world rejects his message. Why is that?

8. John says that the determining factor in whether or not someone has the Spirit of truth or the spirit of falsehood is whether or not they will listen to him. What does this tell us about John's understanding of his own authority?

Apply

9. There are lots of Christian blogs, books, podcasts, social media posts, YouTube channels. How can we be sure we are testing the spirits when we listen to these?

10. The best way to spot a fake is to know what the original looks like. That's certainly the case with the Christian message. How are you getting to know God through the scriptures this week? Be specific as you share your answers.

Pray

8

Have love... and life

Warm-up

Do you think Christianity is really complex? Discuss.

Investigate

Read 1 John 4:7-12

1. Why is it so crucial for Christians to love one another?

Read 1 John 4:13-16a

2. Why is so crucial that we acknowledge that Jesus is God's Son?

Read 1 John 4:16b-18

3. How will living in love give us confidence (instead of fear) on the day of judgment? See also 3:1 and 3:10.

Read 1 John 4:19-21

4. Why do being Christian and loving our brothers and sisters go hand in hand (see v 19 in particular)?

Read 1 John 5:1-5

5. We sing lots of songs that express our love for God, but what does John say will be a sure expression of our love for God?

Read 1 John 5:6-12

6. The idea that Jesus came 'by water' seems to be agreed on by both John and the false teachers he is warning about. Jesus coming 'by water' is a reference to the fact that he came baptizing with

water (see John 3:22 and 4:1). Both John and his opponents were in agreement about this. What they weren't in agreement about was that Jesus also came 'by blood'. That is a reference to his death on the cross which purified us from all sin (1 John 1:7 is the only other reference to blood in the whole letter). So, John is saying, yes Jesus came washing his disciples with water, but more so, he came washing them with his blood—laying down his life as an atoning sacrifice for their sin. Why do you think the false teachers wouldn't accept that God the Son died as a sacrifice for sin (this is a tough question—I'm not sure of the answer myself)?

7. The apostle Paul says in Ephesians 6:17 that the sword of the Spirit is the word of God. In John 15:26 Jesus says the role of the Spirit is to bear witness about him. Give a couple of examples of where else in the Bible the Spirit testifies that Jesus came 'by blood' (i.e. as a sacrifice for sin).

8. How important is it for Christians to believe the Spirit's testimony about Jesus according to verses 10 to 12?

Read 1 John 13-21

9. What is the purpose of John's letter according to verse 13?

10. In light of what we have read so far in 1 John, what could the sin that leads to death possibly be?

11. What comfort/assurance does John offer his readers as he finishes up?

Apply

12. What have been the main things you have taken away from 1 John?

Pray