

1 John 1:1-10

This letter is intended to reassure. John operates against a background of other voices. He writes to encourage those who belong to his church, to see that they have eternal life. Because we are prone to doubt and troubled by the claims of others God has preserved this letter for our benefit.

True Christianity is fellowship with God through Jesus Christ. John states this in v3.

If we are to have fellowship with someone we must in some measure know them. John, one of Jesus closest disciples, reveals his master to us. He heard him speak, observed him from close range and touched his flesh. (v1) These terms serve to emphasize the solid, flesh and blood reality, that comprised the one 'who was from the beginning' Its John's way of asserting that God the Son really took on flesh and became one of us. And he opened his friendship to ordinary people like John

He then sets out the terms of fellowship with the Father and the Son.

We are only able to enjoy fellowship with God through the apostle's testimony. *We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with his Father and with his Son (3) Don't trust anyone who claims to speak for God but who does so with 'a closed Bible'.*

We are only able to enjoy fellowship with God as we walk in the light. (5,6) Light and darkness are favourite categories of John. To walk in the light is to walk in love. (2:10,11) Walking in the light facilitates fellowship not only with God but one another. Check your relationships with your Christian brothers and sisters.

Fellowship with God requires us to deal honestly over our sin and failure. Those who deny their sin call into question their authenticity. Real Christians are not slow to confess their failure and to go to Christ for his forgiveness. Is this something you are doing?

- To be a Christian is to have fellowship with the Father and the Son. Take a moment to consider the privilege involved in that statement.
- If we sense our fellowship with God is not what it should be check yourself against John's terms. Are we listening to the apostle's testimony? Are we walking in love? Are we going to Christ with our sin?

1 John 2:1-11

In writing to reassure, John wants to steer his people away from the kind of behaviour that breeds doubt. Sin will remain a presence in our lives but we are not to give it succour. In fact John issues a call to arms: *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. (1) Sin is serious. It puts us in God's dock. God in his kindness has provided us with a defence counsel, Jesus Christ the Righteous One. We are familiar with the high cost of legal representation. Here though, the immense cost is borne by our advocate himself: He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Appreciating this strengthens our determination to 'not sin'.*

The opposite of sin is obedience. Keeping his commands is the theme of v3-6. Obedience can sound a harsh term but this obedience is enabled. *We know we have come to know him if we keep his commands. (3) We only know him because of what we learned in v1-4. The life appeared, he enabled men like John to enter his friendship, John in turn proclaimed what he discovered so that people like us could have fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ. If I am to live a life of obedience it will be enabled by my appreciation of the privilege of knowing Jesus Christ.*

Jesus impressed upon his disciples the importance of 'keeping his commands' (John 15:9) He went on to say *My command is this: love each other as I have loved you. (John 15:12)* Jesus Christ defines what loving one another looks like. What is distinctive about his love is the way it refuses to be defeated by people and their behaviour. He loved his disciples when they argued about who was the greatest, failed to stay awake, and forsook him and fled. As this 'life' began to be seen in these men so the world started to be exposed to the 'true light'. (8)

John connects loving one another with seeing clearly. (9,10). Hatred condemns us to stumbling and confusion. *They do not know where they are going. (10)* It's only as we allow our lives to be illuminated by Christ and his behaviour that we see ourselves clearly. Its only his word welcomed and believed that unmasks Satan. Its only his atoning death that impresses upon me my indebtedness to my brothers and sisters. (see Matt 18:21-35)

- Consider what Christ has done on behalf of your sin. How should that make us relate to our irritation, short fuse, impurity, critical spirit, laziness, jealousy?
- Christ commands us to love one another. Think about those you find it hard to love and ask God to enable you by his Spirit to do them good.
- Walking in the light is walking in love. Are we seeing ourselves and our direction clearly? If not do we need to check our relationships?

1 John 2:12-27

This letter is written to a specific situation. People have left the church and started their own version of Christianity. They have made certain 'claims' (see 1:5-10) about their morality. Perhaps more importantly they claim to have found a vein of secret knowledge and to know how to access it. (18,19). These developments have troubled John's congregation. He writes to reassure them.

He addresses them as those who share in the great gospel achievements of Jesus Christ. (12- 14)

The children, that is every single member of the church family, have had their sin forgiven and been enabled to know the Father. The 'fathers', the mature believers, '*know him who is from the beginning*'. The '*know him*' in the sense of having fellowship with him. (1:3). It is a product of the new covenant established by the Lord Jesus. The young men likely comprise those who lead and serve the church. He reminds them of their security (*have overcome the evil one*) and the source of their strength. (*the word of God lives in you*)

He warns them against loving the world. (15-17)

He warns them against *loving* the world. In John's vocabulary 'the world' stands for 'the me centred life'. It comprises sensuality (the flesh) beauty (the eyes) and possessions (the pride of life). All of these things have their place. We are though not to crave them because they will lead us to become indifferent to God and his love. This was the tragedy of Solomon. (1 Kings 11:3,4) The implication is also that this is what is driving the behaviour of those who have left the church. Its not love for God but love of themselves.

He reassures them and encourages them to stand firm (18-27)

I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. (26)

Considerable pressure is being applied to this church. There is something attractive about special knowledge and key individuals who can communicate Gods will directly to our lives. John highlights '*their anointing*'

But you have an anointing from the Holy One and all of you know the truth. (20) As for

you the anointing you received from the him remains in you and you do not need anyone to teach you. (27)

This section is shaped by the new covenant that Jesus established with his people through his death. *This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel....No longer will they teach their neighbour or say to one another, "Know the Lord," because they will all know me....For I will forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more. (Jer 31:34)*

John is not telling his church they don't need a pastor he is telling them they don't need a special mediator. That need is met by Christ who has given his people the gift of his Holy Spirit. Don't be led astray by the claims of other groups.

- There will always be people trying to lead us astray. Remind yourself of the gospel benefits: sins forgiven, knowledge of God, strength for the spiritual battle.
- If Solomon could allow his heart to be led astray no one is immune from these dangers. *Guard your heart from everything else you do flows from it. (Prov 4:23)*
- Regularly remind yourself of the benefits of the new covenant not least the gift of the Holy Spirit as our ever present helper.

1 John 2:28 - 3:3

John's letter maintains a great balance of reassurance and challenge. Chapter two began by calling us to fight sin: *My dear children I write this to you so that you will not sin.* But it added, *If anyone does sin we have an advocate with the Father.* That same balance is maintained in this section of the letter.

John reminds us of the return of the Lord Jesus and the serious implications that go with that event. *And now dear children continue in him so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him... (28)* 'Continuing in him' as the next verse explains involves living by his standard of righteousness. Matthew 5 with its teaching on anger, lust, honesty and love for opponents sets out his righteousness. These behavioural traits are the family likeness.

But John is quick to remind us that our security is not based on our behaviour but on the lavish love of our Father. We are not those who, like the elder brother, feel that our slavish endeavours entitle us to the Father's benefits. Hear the amazement in John's 'voice'. (1) This Father has made us the objects of his gracious, extravagant, effectual love. And this love makes us his children.

We are though not to look to the world to confirm our identity. It didn't recognise Gods one true son and it will not spot his many adopted children. We are not to fret over what our future existence may comprise. We are to be clear that when Christ appears, we will finally bear the image of the man from heaven.

The passage ends by returning to challenge. *All who have this hope in him purify themselves just as he is pure. (3)* John would urge us to become increasingly familiar with the ways of Jesus Christ and to co-operate with Gods Spirit as he works to bring about godly change.

- The NT keeps the return of Christ before us. Other goals tend to occupy our attention. What impact ought it to have on our lives to know that Christ really will 'appear' one day?
- Our natural reaction is to think in terms of working our way into Gods love. The returning prodigal asks his father *to make him like one of his hired servants.* He

plans to work his way back into his good books. Our Father's love precedes not only our sin but our birth. Take some time to consider the wonder of that.

- The characteristic of God's children is not perfection but concern. What areas of impurity do you need to work on?

1 John 3:4-10

What does it mean to purify yourself? (3:3) The Bible answers that question in the rest of this section (4-10).

The central idea that informs John's view of the Christian life is fellowship. Through Jesus Christ we are brought to share in the life of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This takes us into the realm of friendship and companionship. Certain kinds of behaviour will be destructive of good relations. The asthmatics can't live with the smokers, the gregarious with the loners, the holy with the sinful.

John writes of Jesus: *You know that he appeared that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. No one who lives in him keeps on sinning.* (5)

Sin is Christ's priority. Not sickness or poverty or political oppression but sin. (5) It stands behind his indignation at the grave of Lazarus. Here is what sin does. It's what drives him to lay down his life at the cross. And he dies not only to change our destiny but to change our behaviour.

We live in a culture where sin is normal. People are prepared to work on their appearance through dieting or going to the gym. Effort may be invested in study to improve intellect. But our behaviour can remain a low priority. The Bible challenges that attitude.

John warns: *do not let anyone lead you astray.* (7) Sin is described as lawlessness (4) The original word behind lawlessness gives us our word anomaly. Sin lacks rational, logic. Its characterised by disorder and chaos. The present sexual revolution redefining things like gender and marriage are illustrations of this. But we are not to be led astray. There is clarity in the simple statements of v7,8 *The one who does what is right is righteous.... The one who does what is sinful is of the devil*

The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. (8)

God made a promise to the devil in the Garden: *The seed of the woman will crush your head.* Jesus gives notice by means of his exorcisms that someone stronger than the strong man has stepped onto the stage. On the eve of his execution he tells his disciples that *"the prince of this world is coming (Satan) but he has no hold over me"*. He breaks Satan's hold on our lives by his obedience to his Father and gifts us his Spirit. It is the presence of his Spirit in our lives (9) that enables us to resist sin and to remain faithful to Christ.

- Is there some area of your behaviour that God is challenging you over just now?
- Beware the articulate arguments and glossy ads that promote sin. Look to the stability and order God provides for our lives in his word.
- Thank God for the gift of the Holy Spirit and be alive to his presence in your life.

1 John 3:11-24

This is the second of three appeals in this letter to 'love one another' (11)

Do not be like Cain.

For John, Christianity is not one end of a spectrum, people who are a little better behaved than the general populace. Christians are radically different, they are people who express

a different kind of life. Cain heads up a humanity that deals in hatred and murder. There is no shortage of anger, competitiveness and selfish ambition in our culture. Cain's behaviour towards his innocent brother is replicated in the attitude of the world to the church. *Do not be surprised my brothers and sisters if the world hates you. (13)*. The new life that Christ gifts us is expressed in our commitment to care and support those who make up our Christian family. *We know we have passed from death to life because we love each other. (14)*

Do be like Christ. (16-18)

Jesus removes the confusion around the meaning of the word love. In his vocabulary love is expressed as sacrifice. (16) As he laid down his life for us so we are to be ready to take action in support of struggling believers. (17) This is not to be restricted to kind words but to be shown in practical action. (18)

Do go to your Father. (19-24)

Love for others is an expression of our new life it is not the cause of it. Our efforts to love one another will often fall short of what we see in the Lord Jesus. How are we to handle our failure? *This is how we know we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence. (19)*. In a recent sermon Jonathan Edmonds pictured what he described as 'the taxi of guilt'. Where do we direct the driver; to distraction or to God? Will I deal with my guilt through alcohol or amusement or indulgence? Or will I head to God? *(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 1:8,9)*

The section ends by reminding us where our security comes from. *And this is his command to believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and to love one another as he commanded us. (23)*

- It is good to be reminded that hatred, selfish anger and violence come from the evil one. It ought to create within us a strong resolve to avoid such things.
- Jesus defines love as sacrifice, something which is both costly and practical. Are you aware of other Christians in practical need?
- Christians are not people who consistently get it right in this area. Our failures serve to emphasise our dependence and need for God's grace on a daily basis.

1 John 4:1-6

John writes to promote confident Christianity. He wants us to be secure in the greater love of God. (3:19,20) But there is no shortage of voices intent on raising doubts over our relationship with God. Many of those voices seek to belittle and mock Christian belief. They allege the gospel belongs alongside fairy stories and Santa Claus. They mock Christians as those who have simply unthinkingly taken on board their parents convictions. Often there is no argument just gentle contempt. John is no stranger to these kinds of other voices. (1)

Christianity is based on solid foundation: *Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. (2)*

Jesus does not inhabit the world of make believe. He occupies a place in time and space. He was born in a particular location and at an exact moment. Had he been born a little later there would have been a record of his birth weight and precise moment at which he entered the world. He doesn't live in the mind of some author. John met him, heard him speak, saw him in action, touched his flesh and found it to be solid.

What people believe about Jesus Christ matters. This child was one of us with the same kind of life as us. But he wasn't just one of us. *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. (1:2)* We part company not only from those who regard Jesus as a myth but also from those who place him alongside other men. Islam regards him as a prophet and the Jehovah Witnesses as a being some distance from God himself. We believe Jesus Christ to be the God man, fully God and perfectly human.

Those who have faith in Jesus Christ are overcomers. (4)

It's likely John's congregation didn't feel like overcomers. People had left. Others groups attracted much more favourable reviews. They felt small and vulnerable. But John doesn't address them as overcomers because of their size or influence he does so because they possess the Holy Spirit. (4). We are not to be dismayed by the worlds estimate of our importance. Nor are we to be intimidated into silence because people disagree or reject what we have to say. In the end God will have his way and those who are united to Jesus Christ will share in that victory.

- In a world of competing voices we need discernment. Can we recognize the Spirit of God? Note John's test. Not, do I sense some internal confirmation but what is being said about Jesus Christ.
- It is the gift of the Holy Spirit who makes us 'overcomers'. Is this something we regularly remind ourselves of?
- Who has our attention? Those who speak from the viewpoint of the world or those who speak by means of the Spirit of truth?

1 John 4: 7-21

Once again the Bible reminds us of the priority of love for one another. (7) In chapter 1 love is made the requirement for fellowship with the Father and the Son. To walk in the light with them is to walk in love. *Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother or sister is still in the darkness. (2:9)*. In chapter 3 Christ's example is set before us. We are under obligation. He laid down his life for us so we ought to be ready to lay down our lives for one another. (3:16). Now this letter comes to its strongest argument. We are familiar with the statement 'God is love' (8) But this love is expressed in a very particular way. *This is how God showed his love among us.....(he) sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (10)* He sent his Son on a mission to turn his righteous wrath away from our lives by his own atoning death. Our 'mission' is to reveal the reality and attractiveness of the invisible God by our sacrificial care and commitment to one another. (12)

You will only live like this if you are sure you are loved by God. *This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: he has given us of his Spirit. (13)* The Spirit is the sign that we share in Gods life. But how do you know you have the Spirit? It is the Holy Spirit who reveals God to us. And he illuminates

God not as some Star Wars like force behind all that there is - but as the Father who sent his Son. The events of Bethlehem and Nazareth and Galilee are interpreted as ordered and directed by the love of the Father. And the Spirit illuminates Jesus not as some religious teacher or selfless martyr but as the one who lovingly saves the world by his death. It is because of the work of the Spirit that we are brought into this life: We know the first person of the Trinity as our loving Father. We relate to Jesus Christ as the one who has rescued our lives.

And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. (16) We don't rely on our service or our relative goodness or our supposed moral superiority. We rely on the gospel. It is the Fathers salvation plan and the Sons atoning death that drives out my fear of rejection and punishment. It frees me up to live a life of love towards others.

- It's easy to relegate 'loving one another' to a marginal place in our lives. John makes it central to the gospel, giving evidence of the reality and character of God to a watching world. Who is God challenging us to show his love towards?
- Give thanks for the Spirits ministry. Take some time today to consider that God has given us of his Spirit. Be alert to his influence in your life.
- Are we relying on the love God has for us?

1 John 5:1-12

The second half of chapter four impresses upon us the very great love God has for his people. It follows that we will want to respond to this love or to use the language of 4:18 we will want to 'live in love' These scriptures explain what that will look like in practice: *In fact this is love for God: to keep his commands. (5:3)*

The commandments direct us away from ourselves. They orientate our lives towards God and other people. We meet together on the Lords day (4th commandment) not simply for our own good but for the encouragement of others. Jesus goes to the root of the 6th commandment forbidding murder and speaks to us about anger. We love our brother when we feel anger but choose forgiveness. This is God's love language. Its called obedience.

And his commandments are not burdensome. (3) The world is relentlessly communicating that these things are not important. Don't spoil your life by becoming religious. God is dull and best avoided for as long as possible. Jesus has broken that spell. His life, lived under the authority of God's word, displays rich joy and great peace. And it is faith in his commitment to us and leadership of us that overcomes the siren voices of the world.

John has already borne witness to the flesh and blood reality that is the Son of God. The letter opened with his eyewitness testimony to the arrival of *the life which was with the Father and has appeared to us. (1:2)* To that he adds the testimony of God expressed at his baptism (Mark 1:11) in his death and resurrection and through the Spirit. (Romans 1:4). We are given every reason to accept this testimony about Jesus and to know that through trusting him as the Son of God we will share in his life.

- Do we need to reconsider our attitude to Gods commandments? Do we view them as a regrettable chore or a means of expressing our love for God?
- The key to living an effective Christian life is not found in our personal resolve but in our confidence in Jesus Christ. Look again at John's testimony (1:1-4) and listen to the three witness who confirm the identity of Jesus as Gods Son. (5:6-9)
- Memorize 1 John 5:11,12

1 John 5: 13-21

This letter is here to promote confident Christianity. This is not a confidence that comes from within or even from our 'successes'. John writes: *I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know you have eternal life. (1)* VW cars like to think their name conveys reliability. Certain stores look to convince you that their name stands for excellent service and good value. Our confidence arises out of the one who perfectly carried through the Fathers salvation plan and defeated all our enemies. The strap line to Jesus life could have been: "He has done everything well" This is the one whose name is now above every name.

This confidence is to be expressed in prayer. God has, through the commandments, the promises and the prayers of the Bible, revealed his will to us. These things can be brought before him with boldness. (14,15) John highlights a particular form of prayer. *If you see*

any brother or sister commit a sin that does not lead to death, you should pray and God will give them life. (16) Here is how Christians respond to the failures of one another. They don't gossip or criticize but pray. This is hardly surprising in a letter that has so much to say about loving one another.

The third area of certainty is described in v20. *We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true.* In v18 he references 'safety'. In a world of temptation Jesus shows me that, becoming safe is deepening my dependence on his grace. In other words I learn that growing up is growing down. He teaches us what to expect from the world *that is under the control of the evil one.* It takes us back to 3:13 *Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters if the world hates you.* The clearer we become about Christ the more we will understand the world around us.

- What's the thing that you find the most reassuring about Jesus Christ and his ministry for us? (see 2:2, 3:16, 4:9,10)
- What troubles your faith most - when do you find yourself doubting that you have eternal life?
- What can we do to encourage ourselves to pray rather than comment on those who have sinned?