



True Love

1 John

Bible Studies For Ashfield Presbyterian Church
ashfieldpresbyterian.org.au

1 John 1:1-2:2: Counterfeit Christianity

The Big Question - Who's In the Family?

John's 'big issue' in this letter is to reassure his readers that everything is okay, even though they've been excluded by their community. Though their fellow Jews claim they are the ones who know the Father, John puts a different view... with one very good reason!

Read 1 John 1:1-4.

1. What is John using as the basis of his 'proclamation'?

What particularly did the apostles see and hear and touch? (Look at John 20:25, 27 and the end of Acts 1:22 to shape your answer.)

2. When John says "the life appeared," what's he have in mind? (v2)
3. "Life" was a big topic back in John's gospel too. What kind of "life" was it? (It might help to read John 5:21, 6:40, and 11:25)
4. From verse 3, what is the fellowship of John's readers based on? (Who's "in" the fellowship John describes?)

Testing The Claims

5. **Read 1 John 1:5-2:2.** Summarise the claims being made about sin.

6. What kind of people would have claimed a special relationship with God, and claimed to be without sin? We don't have to look far. Let's again look back to John's gospel...

Read John 9:40-41. Who is Jesus talking to? What are they claiming?

There are similar ideas in John 5:37-47, 7:28, 8:19,41,54-55 and 16:3. Jesus and the Jews are always at odds over this point. They claim to be the people of God, but they reject God's Son. They see no need for repentance and forgiveness of their sins. They read their law, but fail to live it out.

7. Put yourself in John's shoes for a moment - and the Christians he's writing to. They're hated by their own people because of their faith in Jesus. But as John sees it, their commitment to Jesus should be non-negotiable. Why?

1:1-2

1:7b

2:1-2

8. It may be that, as a non-Jew yourself, you're wondering how all this is relevant. How are the rest of us explicitly included in 1 John 2:2?

Wrapping up...

9. What view of sin (and its antidote) will you have if you're a true member of God's family?

10. What kinds of exclusion can we expect to face today as true members of God's family?

11. What view of one another will you have if you're a true member of God's family?

The Bottom Line

If you're truly part of God's family, you'll know you're a sinner, forgiven and made clean by the death and resurrection of Jesus. You might be excluded by others, but you'll love one another. Keep at it!

Prayer

Pray together about the issues raised in this passage.

1 John 2:3-27: Authentic Christianity

Recap and Reflections

Take a quick look back at 'the bottom line' of last week's study. God's family is made of up of sinners, forgiven through the atoning death of Jesus, loving one another as brothers and sisters. How has this 'bottom line' been part of your life during the past week?

1. **Read 1 John 2:3-11.** If being Jewish isn't the main marker of being in God's family, what is?

Family Matters - A Word Of Reassurance (2:12-14)

2. **Read 1 John 2:12-14.** John's letter is famous for the number of times he actually tells us why he's writing. It's kind of helpful when you're trying to work it out! In this section, he'll say it over and over again.

* Why is John writing to these 'dear children'?

* Why is John writing to the 'fathers'?

* Why is he writing to the 'young men'?

How should these statements affect their confidence?

Summarise the benefits these true members of God's family enjoy...

Would John make the same statements about you? Why or why not?

3. **Read 1 John 2:21 and 26-27** for two more statements about why John is writing. Why do you imagine he is saying these things?

Those Who Have Gone... And Those Who Remain

Here's where the rubber hits the road. Because they 'loved the world,' the rest of Israel has deserted their Messiah. Instead of being 'pro' their Christ, they are 'anti.'

4. **Read I John 2:15-27.** In any other social, political or business split, you'd expect the bigger group would retain 'title rights', and the minority would leave. But how does John describe the split in 2:19? Why?

5. John describes lots of qualities of those who (like himself) remain in contrast to those who have gone. Those who remain 'have an anointing from the Holy One' and they 'know the truth.' In contrast, what's the one big 'lie' driving those who have gone?

6. What 'family of God test' does John apply in 2:22-23?

Why was that such a contentious statement back then?

Why is it a contentious statement today? (What would happen if you put 2:23 on a notice board at work?)

7. Even in 'religious' circles, some prefer a 'Jesus-free Christianity.' Can you think of examples?

What problem can arise if we limit ourselves to talking about "God" rather than specifically about Jesus? (Why does it somehow feel 'safer')

What would you say to someone who claimed to know God, but wasn't interested in Jesus?

8. From verse 24 to 27, what one thing do we need to do? (It's mentioned a few times!)

The Bottom Line

Being part of the family of God is all about Jesus! We believe that this one man in history was and is the Son of God. And without the Son, nobody has the Father!

Prayer

Pray together about the issues raised in this study.

1 John 2:28-3:10

Like Father, like Son

A number of years ago *Newsweek* featured an article on the increasing amount of people within our society who are claiming to be "born again." The article included the following report:

According to a recent Gallup survey based on personal interviews with 1,553 Americans of voting age, half of all Protestants—and a third of all Americans—say they have been 'born again.' That figure comes to nearly 50 million adult Americans who claim to have experienced a turning point in their lives by making a personal commitment to Jesus Christ as their Saviour. ("Born Again," *Newsweek*, October 25, 1976, p. 68.)



How would we go about discovering if the results of that survey were true? Where would we turn in God's Word to validate such a claim? Without question, 1 John 2:28—3:10 provides one of the clearest tests in Scripture for determining whether one who claims to be a Christian has truly been born of God.

Opening Discussion

1. What do you think your local community would be like if one third of everyone who lived there was born again?
2. **Read 1 John 2:28-3:10.** Based on John's emphasis at the beginning and the end of the passage (2:28-29; 3:9-10), what test is he using to validate a person's claim of being born again?
3. Throughout this passage John teaches that God's children resemble their Father. In what ways does he reinforce this principle (2:29— 3:10)?
4. How does John's definition of sin (v. 4) compare with some of the viewpoints people have today?
5. Although Christians can and do sin, how does knowing Christ change our relationship to sin (v. 6)?
6. Why does the new birth make it impossible for God's children to have a life characterized by sin (v. 9)?
7. As one who has been born of God, what are some ways you see the family traits of obedience and love developing in your life?
8. In what area would you like to be more obedient?

Prayer

Pray that your family resemblance to God and to Christ would be increased.

1 John 3:10-24: Costly Love

Opening Discussion

1. Is it possible to obey a command to love someone? Why, or why not?
2. “Love is not a feeling, so much as an inclination to put the welfare of another ahead of yourself.” Discuss this definition.
3. Read (aloud in your group) 1 John 2:7, 2:24 and 3:11. Then go back to John’s gospel and read John 13:34. Revise your answers (above) in the light of this command from Jesus.

Have you ever tried to obey this command? What has it felt like?

Read 1 John 3:10-24 aloud in your group, emphasising every reference to ‘love’.

4. What other key theme appears in this chapter?
5. The story of two famous brothers is referred to in verse 12. What do we learn about each brother from this verse?
6. Verses 4 to 10 focus on those who practice righteousness (like Abel) and those who keep on sinning (like Cain.) From verse 10, what does this ‘make evident’?
7. From verse 10b and verse 11, what is the ultimate issue?
8. From verse 14, what is the key Christian distinctive family likeness?
9. Note all the references to ‘the brothers’ in these verses.

Cain and Abel provide the tragic prototype of a family divided. One brother is unrighteous and hates. The other is righteous, and loves. In John’s experience, this is exactly what he sees happening around him in the family of Israel. Not only have his ‘brother Jews’ killed Jesus - they now hate anyone who wants to follow him.

What does this demonstrate about them? (v15)

What does John put forward as the model response? (v16)

10. How will this kind of love play out in practice, according to v17?

Here's where the rubber hits the road. It sounds like John is saying that even though their brother Israelites hate Jesus-followers, true Jesus-followers will love them in return! It's an astonishing thought. But Jesus always said "Love your enemies!" (See Luke 6)

11. What comfort does John promise for those who put these difficult principles into action? (v19-22)

The opening discussion question asked what it felt like if you've ever tried putting the love command into action, even when you didn't feel like it. John's promise is that - even if it's tough - we'll feel strangely reassured in our hearts that we belong to Jesus! If you're lacking that sense of assurance, try dishing out some costly, self-sacrificial love to those who don't deserve it!

The Bottom Line:

According to 1 John 3:23, there's a basic two-part commandment that defines us as members of God's family. Believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another. Try it this week!

Prayer

Pray together about the issues raised in this study.

1 John 4:1-5:5

To Know Him Is To Love Him

Recap and Reflections

Before you begin this study, spend a few minutes looking back.

Do you have any thoughts to share from Sunday's sermon?

How have you been going with the two-part commandment from 1 John 3:23? Have you had any opportunities to 'obediently love' during the week?

Us and Them...

1. **Read 1 John 4:1-12.** Why is there such a great need for Christians to be discerning (v. 1)?
2. What test does John give us for determining whether a person's teaching is from "the Spirit of God" or the "spirit of the antichrist" (vv. 2-3)?
3. As Christians, how can we overcome the doctrinal errors that continually confront us (vv. 4-6)?
4. Why must we be diligent in our devotion to one another (vv. 7-8)?
5. How does God's love for you motivate you to love others (v. 11)?
6. How does our love for each other make the invisible God visible in our midst (v. 12)?

In the sequel to *Pilgrim's Progress*, Mr. Great-Heart and Father Honest engage in a conversation about an old friend, Mr. Fearing. At one point in the dialogue he is portrayed in the following way: "He was a man that had the root of the matter in him, but he was one of the most troublesome Pilgrims that I ever met with in all my days." That is Bunyan's way of describing many who are on the road to heaven: thoroughly sincere (the root of the matter is in them) yet so overloaded with doubts and fears that their pilgrimage is indeed "troublesome." How is Mr. Fearing to fare in this life? How does he, and how do we, overcome this kind of problem? The answer, in part, lies within this passage in 1 John.



7. **Read 1 John 4:13-5:5.** What three tests does John give for determining whether "we live in him and he in us" (vv. 13-16)?
8. How is our experience of God's love related to our ability to love others (vv. 16, 19)?

9. What insights does verse 18 give us into why we sometimes fear God and others? How can the principle "perfect love drives out fear" (v. 18) help you overcome your fears?

10. Why is it impossible to love God and yet hate one of the members of his family (vv. 19-21)?

11. In what ways can this passage strengthen our confidence before God?

12. What are some inevitable results of the new birth (5:1-2)?

13. Why is obedience to God's commandments not burdensome for Christians (v. 3)? How then can we explain the struggle we sometimes have to obey?

14. Reflect for a moment on the two major characteristics of the world described earlier (see 2:15-17; 4:1-6). What then does it mean for us to "overcome the world" (vv. 4-5)? What evidence of the victory over the world do you see in your life?

Prayer

Ask that you would be filled with love. Ask God to fill you with love for someone whom you find difficult to love. Take time to thank God for his son, and for the victory and eternal life we have in him.

1 John 5:6-21

Solid Confidence

The Two 'Comings' Of Jesus

1 John 5:6 has been confusing people for centuries. What does it mean that Jesus both 'came by water' and 'came by blood'? What options are there for what is meant?

Maybe you didn't notice, but back in John's gospel, Jesus 'came in the flesh' twice! Is it perhaps by the water of human birth and the blood of the cross? ...

Why the fuss? Why all the fuss about a few words? Because according to John, it's these issues that decide who's in the family and who's out of it! It's these issues that mark the line between true prophets and false, true spirits and deceptive ones. And it's the reason we hope for eternal life!

1. **Read 1 John 5:6-21.** According to 5:6, there are three witnesses. From 5:11-13, how do these three witnesses confirm our hope of eternal life?

Escaping The Consequences Of Sin

The final verses of 1 John seem to have a sting in the tail - though not so much if you read them in the light on the rest of the letter.

2. From 4:10, what solution has God offered to sin?

From 1:8-10, what were John's fellow Jews (his Israelite brothers and sisters) claiming?

3. According to 2:1-2, what's the logical consequence for Jewish brothers and sisters who reject Jesus?
4. Now read 1 John 5:16-17. What's the (only) kind of sin that doesn't lead to death? (Who keeps us safe, according to verse 18?)

It's a sure bet that God will give life to any brother or sister who sins but trusts in Jesus. But for those who reject Jesus... there's not even a prayer! In other words, if you want to be saved from sin, trust in Jesus!

5. From verses 18 to 20, how do we know we're God's true family?

Where does this leave John's opponents (fellow Jews, who claim God is their father.)

6. If, according to verse 20, we are in the true God by being in his Son Jesus Christ, what fresh light does this throw on the idea of idolatry (v21)?

Final Reflections

7. How has 1 John changed your view of Jesus?
8. How have you been challenged to think and act more lovingly?
9. Have you been helped to recognise 'the true family of God' more clearly? Have you been personally reassured or challenged by this?

Prayer

Pray together on the basis of some of your final reflections.