

A Study of 1 John 2:3-17

³And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. ⁴Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, ⁵but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: ⁶whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. ⁷Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. ⁸At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. ⁹Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. ¹⁰Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. ¹¹But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes. ¹²I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name’s sake. ¹³I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, children, because you know the Father. ¹⁴I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one. ¹⁵Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. ¹⁷And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

From the very beginning of this letter John addresses the two false teachings and the resulting incorrect beliefs and practices.

- Jesus was truly and fully human. (1:1)
- He was with the Father before He was born (1:3)
- We cannot claim to have fellowship with God and live according to the world. (1:6)
- Everyone has sinned and will sin.
- True believers are forgiven and will be forgiven when they confess their sin.

The wrong beliefs in the church stemmed from the different groups being unable to hold together the full humanity of Jesus and the full deity of Jesus. They were too set in their already held beliefs to be able to embrace the uniqueness of Jesus. Instead of focusing on how in Jesus the divine and human came together, they could only see how the two were different.

In this letter, John will use multiple terms and images. Like the people in the church John is addressing, many Christians today will focus on the differences between these terms and images. But John is not defining these terms directly. Rather, he is showing their relationships to each other. To understand 1 John properly, we need to focus on the relationships.

Here are some of the relationships that we seen so far in the letter.

- FELLOWSHIP AND LIGHT – 1:6-7
- KNOWLEDGE-OBEDIENCE-LOVE -2:3-4
- ABIDING-OBEDIENCE – 2:5-6
- OBEDIENCE-LIGHT-LOVE – 2:10-11
- LOVE-OBEDIENCE – 2:15

John will continue to do this throughout the letter.

- FAITH-TRUTH-ABIDING-LIFE – 2:24-27
- ABIDING-RIGHTEOUSNESS-LOVE – 3:6-10
- LOVE-LIFE – 3:14-15
- LOVE-TRUTH – 3:18-20
- OBEDIENCE-TRUTH-FAITH-LOVE – 3:23
- OBEDIENCE-ABIDING-SPIRIT – 3:24
- LOVE-TRUTH – 4:9-10
- LOVE-ABIDING – 4:11-12
- ABIDING-SPIRIT – 4:13
- FAITH-TRUTH-ABIDING – 4:15-16
- OBEDIENCE-LOVE – 4:21
- FAITH-LOVE-OBEDIENCE – 5:1-3
- TRUTH-ABIDING-LIFE – 5:11-12
- TRUTH-ABIDING – 5:20

The list is impressive – love, truth, faith, obedience, life, light, abiding, fellowship, Spirit, righteousness. John assumes his readers know what the words mean. His focus is the relationship with these words.

What is the danger of treating these words as separate rather than related?

Let's look at the verses in the first two chapters to see how John relates these terms.

What is the relationship between fellowship and light in 1:6-7?

What is John communicating with this relationship?

What is John connecting in 2:3-4? How are they connected?

Why is it important for Christians to understand this relationship?

In 2:5-6, John introduces a new term “abiding.” What is this being related to?

In 2:10-11, John is connecting terms he introduced before to ones he has introduced later. How are obedience, light, and love connected by John?

In a different way, John connects love and obedience again in 2:15. How does he do that?

Look back over the first two chapters. How are all of the following terms connected? *love, truth, faith, obedience, life, light, abiding, fellowship, Spirit, righteousness*

How does keeping these terms related help prevent having wrong or incomplete understanding of each of the terms? What mistakes might people make if they do not see these relationships?

There is a lot of discussion about why John wrote 2:12-14 the way that he did. Here are the major positions:

- John is writing to three different groups in the church.
- John is writing to the church as a whole and then to the leaders in the church.
- John is writing to Christians at different stages of spiritual growth.
- John is using a literary device for effect, but he is intending for the message for the entire church.

Regardless of which position is right, it does not affect the overall meaning. One of the reasons is because of what John is writing to the different groups:

- Your sins are forgiven for his name's sake.
- You know him who is from the beginning.
- You have overcome the evil one.
- You know the Father.

None of these seems to apply to one particular group of Christians. Rather, they all seem to be describing what should pertain to all Christians. If we understand these verses this way, what is John saying is the main reason he is writing to the church?

FOR REFLECTION

Many modern Christians separate different descriptions of what it means to be a Christian – emphasizing some and sometimes ignoring others. Here are some of the phrases from 1 John:

- Fellowship with the Father and with his Son
- Walk in the light
- Fellowship with one another
- Know Him
- Keep his commandments
- Whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected
- Walk in the same way in which he walked
- Whoever loves his brother walks in the light
- If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him
- Whoever does the will of God abides forever

There are others – sinlessness, righteousness. Why do we emphasize some over the others? How does it help us to see how these are all related and are often different ways of saying the same thing?