

**John 14:15-24                      May 6, 2018**  
**1John 1:1-4 (Ephesians 2:10-22)**

## **Confessing the Truth**

**We are five weeks now from Easter, here proclaiming the truth we know: Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! As we prepare to share in His presence through Holy Communion it is appropriate to reflect on the core of our faith. What does it mean to be a Christian? Is a Christian someone who admires the teachings of Jesus? Is it someone who tries to apply some of these teachings? Does being a Christian mean gaining inner peace or some spiritual benefit? Does it simply mean trying to make the world a better place? Are Christians merely the glue that holds Western civilization together? Who is a true Christian and who is not? These questions are not really new at all. Within a few short years of His resurrection and ascension, people were asking questions about Jesus.**

**Spiritual counterfeits sprang up wherever the gospel spread. Some early examples include the Judaizers,<sup>1</sup> the Gnostics, the Docetics<sup>2</sup> and the Cerinthians.<sup>3</sup> And some who professed a Christian faith had been led astray by these false teachers.**

**The “Beloved Disciple,” the one to whom Jesus had commended His mother as He hung on the cross, was the author of the Gospel of John, the book of Revelation, and three short letters to some early Christians.**

**Today I am starting a series of messages on the letters of John. His first was a "dear Children" letter to encourage them to stand fast, to remain in fellowship with God, to reject false teachers and to show true Christian love to each other. He writes to clarify for believers and to confront the false gospels being taught. It still speaks eloquently to the moral and spiritual confusion of the 21st-century. Today we'll look at the first chapter of the first letter of John.**

**In this first letter John weaves together the themes of truth, obedience, and love. If we want to have fellowship with God, we must . . . 1) Know God's truth, 2) Obey God's commandments, and 3) Love God's children.**

## **Background**

**Most scholars believe this letter was written sometime around AD 90-95. That's 60 or more years after Jesus walked the earth. By this time John was a very old man and the last living apostle. Most likely it was written from Ephesus where John was considered the "Bishop of Asia." John writes as a beloved spiritual leader to believers he knows very well.**

**We don't know much about the church or churches John addresses outside the contents of the epistle itself. (His other writings, the Gospel of John, the two other short epistles, and Revelation add a few more clues). Tradition says**

that this epistle was written to a church or churches in the area of Ephesus. The letter shows overlapping themes with the Gospel of John (in particular with Jesus' farewell discourse in chapters 14-16).

It was a time of confusion among the believers to whom John writes. Apparently some members had left and formed an alternate church. They may have been Gnostics of some stripe, people attracted to teachings that relied on having special or secret knowledge about truth and salvation, above and beyond that taught by the apostles and Scripture. They used Christian terms and referred to Jesus, but they didn't mean the same thing as taught in Scripture. [Gnostics taught that the O. T. god was the creator of the material world, which was of lesser value (if not downright evil) than the spiritual world. By following these teachings, the followers could escape the flesh at death and become truly spiritual beings.]

Gnosticism adapted some of the teaching of Jesus with those of Greek philosophy. It seems that the group that departed had trouble believing in a fully human Jesus. They could believe that Jesus was a man who was filled with the Spirit of God at baptism to show us a way. But the Spirit left when the human Jesus died on a cross. They could believe in a divine Christ, who only appeared as human but was not really human, but fully human and fully divine and resurrection of the body, that was not believable to them. And believing as they did they still considered themselves to be Christians – though more “spiritual” than others.

These gnostic-type believers had moved beyond the teachings of the apostles, Scripture, and Jesus, and saw those left behind as stuck in old, outmoded traditions, and not very spiritual. If they rejected Jesus, as taught by the apostles, surely they had no room for John either.

The believers who remained in the church, to whom John wrote, were confused and hurt. Some were wondering, were they indeed inferior Christians or Christians at all? Word of their troubles got to John, and he responded with this epistle, to assure them that they were the true “Christians.”

### **True Fellowship**

Note that the book does not begin with a greeting. Similar to the way John began his gospel, he jumps right into the meat of his message. John begins by telling them that what he is saying goes back to the ministry of Jesus.<sup>4</sup> *“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”* 1 John 1:1. John says “we” because he’s including the witness of the other apostles - the ones who had seen Jesus with their own eyes, heard Him with their ears, beheld His mighty works, and handled this “Word of Life.” After His resurrection, they had eaten with Jesus, saw and touched His wounds, and heard His voice. This is all known personal

experience. The apostolic witness to Jesus is foundational to the true Christian faith. The Christian must measure their faith against this witness. (They along with the Old Testament prophets are specially called agents of God to speak His word).

Clearly, John's testimony is at odds with those who broke away. John preached a gospel based on a real, historical Christ, and eternal life came through a flesh and blood Savior. Jesus is not a mystical ideal but the actual Son of God in human flesh. He was divine and human. It was the will of the Father that people would come to Him only through His Son.

*"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,"* 1 John 1:3. John is careful to say that our fellowship is with the Father AND the Son. One cannot be in fellowship with God without being in fellowship with His Son. Those who left the fellowship claim a higher knowledge that really negates Jesus as the way and the truth and the life.

The essence of the Christian life is genuine and intimate fellowship with God, and true fellowship among Christians is rooted in a shared experience with Jesus Christ. Deep joy is the natural result of fellowship with God through Jesus and with one another in Jesus. *"We write this to make our joy complete,"* 1 John 1:4.

### Conditions of True Fellowship

*"... God is light; in him there is no darkness at all,"* 1 John 1:5. Yet how easily does self-deception overtake us. When we continue to live in sin and think we can have fellowship with God, then we lie to ourselves and to others. *"If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth,"* 1 John 1:6. God says, "let there be light" and it illuminates reality and reveals what is hidden. The light of Christ removes all the shadows of our lives, revealing to us the dark spots on our souls. His light demands a moral choice, and so to walk with God requires total honesty. As we walk in the light, the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin so that we can have fellowship with the Father and with other believers.

*"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us,"* 1 John 1:8. Sure, many of us will easily say, "I'm a sinner." But John means that when we are blind to our true condition the truth is far away. It's so easy to do with the comparison game ... "I'm not as bad as he/she is." Or unconsciously we count up all the years we've been in church and give ourselves a pass on the sin thing. We lie to ourselves about our true condition.

*"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness,"* 1 John 1:9. True confession includes both an admission of guilt and a cry to God for forgiveness. Continual

confession leads to continual cleansing that leads to continual fellowship with God.

Lastly, ***"If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us,"*** 1 John 1:10. When we unconsciously say to ourselves "I haven't sinned in the past either," then we're lying to God. To deny our sin is to turn deliberately into the darkness. Our greatest need is deep honesty about our true condition and total dependence on Christ to deliver us.

### **True Truth for Any Age**

1 John was written as a tract for his times yet it also speaks eloquently to the moral and spiritual confusion of the 21st-century. Human organizations begin to devolve and corrupt over time. Though divinely appointed, the church is peopled with humans, who are prone to pride and ignorance and all the sins known to us. Many church members and leaders have one foot in the kingdom of God, and one foot out. It is hard for us to draw the boundaries of Christian truth because we don't want to hurt anyone's feelings, or we're not clear ourselves on what is Christian truth, or we don't know what the Scriptures say, or we're afraid of disagreement or conflict, or we're divided within ourselves.

All too often the original mission of Christ's church is replaced by human inventions that reshape the teachings of Jesus to fit the spirit of the times or human desires. The church is in continual need of reformation and to be brought back to the essence and core of the faith.

Our times are no different. There are many competing voices claiming the truth. When the church strays from the truth of Christ, focuses inward, it struggles to make disciples, and withers. It even happens that some churches and organizations have strayed so far that they are now vociferous opponents of gospel truth. How can a people who give lip service to doctrines of Christian truth while denying them in reality, be a church at all?

Our society is divided, our denomination is divided, and perhaps to some extent so is our own congregation. Let us beware, though, of dividing ourselves along political lines – I see and hear too much of that. Politics is downstream from culture, and culture is downstream from religion. It is a destructive thing to let our politics determine our religion. It must be the other way round. Our religion, in this case faith in the saving and transforming power of Jesus Christ, must determine our worldview, and how we see culture and politics. To clarify and return to the foundational beliefs is essential to this reformation. ***"I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles,"*** 2 Peter 3:2. Where do we find these words? In the Scriptures – that must be our guide.

John's letter reminds us that we must affirm that the true believer is one who holds to the apostolic testimony about Jesus, found in Scripture as the word of God. Those who think that Jesus was a teacher of good deeds, but who

**do not hold to Him to be fully human and fully divine has not realized the truth. And anyone who does not confess their sins and live openly before the Lord, cannot have fellowship with God or with his people. Simply put John tells us to: 1) Know God's truth, 2) Obey God's commandments, and 3) Love God's children.**

**Jesus said: *“Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them,”* John 14:21.**

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.gotquestions.org/Judaizers.html> In the early church, those who taught a combination of God's grace and human effort were called "Judaizers." The word *Judaizer* comes from a Greek verb meaning "to live according to Jewish customs." The word appears in [Galatians 2:14](#) where Paul describes how he confronted Peter for forcing Gentile Christians to "Judaize."

A Judaizer taught that, in order for a Christian to truly be right with God, he must conform to the Mosaic Law. Circumcision, especially, was promoted as necessary for salvation. Gentiles had to become Jewish proselytes *first*, and *then* they could come to Christ. The doctrine of the Judaizers was a mixture of grace (through Christ) and works (through the keeping of the Law). This false doctrine was dealt with in Acts 15 and strongly condemned in the book of Galatians.

<sup>2</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Docetism>. Docetism is the belief that Jesus only seemed to be human, and that his human form was an illusion.

<sup>3</sup><https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cerinthus>. Cerinthus denied that the Supreme God made the physical world.<sup>[1]</sup> In Cerinthus' interpretation, the Christ came to Jesus at [baptism](#),<sup>[2]</sup> guided him in his ministry,<sup>[citation needed]</sup> but left him at the [crucifixion](#).

<sup>4</sup> We know from the Gospel of John that the apostle was originally a disciple of John the Baptist and followed Jesus after the Baptist had identified Jesus as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."