

An Attempt To Listen To God

A Survey of The First Epistle of John

By

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Introduction

- 1) It has always been the work of Satan to seek to confuse the minds and hearts of people by counterfeits or corruption. This being so, shortly after the church began erroneous teachings were being taught. Jude tells one of the ways in which this was done, “*men crept in unawares*” (Jude 1:4). The word “unawares” means to slip in sideways, by stealth. It was by taking advantage of the trusting character of believers in accepting those who say they are saved. When their erroneous teachings were accepted, it led to confusion among the saints and often times heresy and apostasy.
- 2) As today, the ancient cults denied one of the two major fundamentals of the gospel, and sometimes both. They denied the unchangeable deity and Godhead or the Lord’s true humanity. At times there is the admittance of the deity of Christ, but with it there would be a denial of His humanity. The argument is: “How could God, who is pure spirit, have anything to do with a material body which is vile?” Their solution was: either Christ was not really human, but only apparently so; or else the Christ spirit did not inhabit Jesus until baptism. Either Jesus was too divine to be truly human, or too human to be really divine.
- 3) As with all doctrine, it affects lifestyle. Consequently, when these teachings spread among the saints, the results are the truths of God would then become academics for the mind, void of any practical affect.
- 4) Foremost among those who taught error were the precursors of the Gnostics who, although they had not fully developed their false seed, was being spread. They derived their name from the Greek word “to know”, professing to have superior knowledge. They taught that material things belonged to one realm and spiritual things to another, and there was no point of contact between them. John will state unequivocally that they are intimately connected both in Christ and the believer, therefore he will emphasize:
 - a) The Lord’s incarnation (1 Jn. 4:2)
 - b) His being sent by the Father (1 Jn. 4:14)
 - c) Jesus was the Christ (1 Jn. 2:22; 5:1)
 - d) That which is done in the body effects the spirit, and one cannot have a defiled body and a pure spirit (1 Jn. 3:3)
- 5) The New Testament was written by eight men: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, Peter, James, and Jude. Between them they were twenty-seven books with three men either in writing or influencing the writing of twenty-two of them.
 - a) Paul wrote Romans, 1st and 2nd Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, 1st and 2nd Thessalonians, 1st and 2nd Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. Whether he wrote Hebrews or not is a matter for discussion.
 - b) Luke wrote the gospel that bears his name and the book of the Acts.
 - c) It is generally accepted that Peter worked with Mark in the writing of Mark’s gospel.
 - d) It is also generally accepted that John wrote his gospel, three epistles, and the Revelation.
- 6) John saw the church as a family (1 Jn. 2:12-14). John is very careful in his terminology for while in the KJV he calls the saints “sons” of God (Jn. 1:12; Rom. 8:14; 1 Jn. 3:1-2), the Greek word is “teknon”, which ought to be translated “children”. John never speaks of the believers as “sons of God”, always “children”. The word “huios”, translated “Son”, is reserved by John for the Lord alone. Furthermore, never in all the scriptures is any believer called a “son of God”, they are always called “sons” in plural. The title “Son of God” is exclusive to Christ.
- 7) Dean Farrar, with spiritual discernment, in his rich book “The Early days of Christianity”, made the very astute observations between Paul and John:
 - a) Paul begins his writings with man (Rom. 1:16) but John begins his writings with God (Jn. 1:1).
 - b) Paul is practical, he dwells incessantly on faith, hope, and love (1 Cor. 13:13), whereas John deals mainly with love, life, and light (Jn. 13:34; 5:40; 1:8)
 - c) Paul is the theologian and John is a mystic.
 - i) Theology can be hard without mysticism, and mysticism is sentimental without theology.

Author

- 1) Of the twenty-seven New Testament books there are only five which have the appearance of being anonymous. They are Hebrews, John's gospel, and his three epistles. However, it is taken by internal and external evidences that John, the son of Zebedee, the brother of James (Matt. 4:21), "the disciple whom Jesus loved" and who "leaned on Jesus bosom" (Jn. 13:23), was the writer. John and his father's family lived in Bethsaida (Jn. 1:44). There were four in the family of Zebedee: Salome, James and John, with the father and sons employed as fishermen (Matt. 4:18-22). From the end of the gospels John is mentioned three times in the Acts (3:1; 4:13; 8:14; Gal. 2:9) and nothing more until his own writings (Jn. 1:40; Rev. 1:1, 4, 9).
- 2) The internal evidence is from the similarity between John's gospel and his epistles in the use of the same words. Some of these are: "life" (Jn. 3:36 & 1 Jn. 2:25); "light" (Jn. 3:21 & 1 Jn. 1:7); "love" (Jn. 10:17 & 1 Jn. 3:14, 16-18); "manifest" (Jn. 1:31 & 1 Jn. 2:19), "only-begotten" (Jn. 1:14 & 1 Jn. 4:9). Clearly, he is an eyewitness (1 Jn. 1:1-4), which would suggest an individual who had been with Jesus from the outset of His earthly ministry.
- 3) The depth of his ministry indicates a very mature believer who has a genuine compassion for the people of God, having gained the "right" to be a spiritual guide.
 - a) His compassion and tenderheartedness is manifested by such expressions as: "my little children" (1 Jn. 2:1; 3:18); "brethren" (1 Jn. 2:7; 3:13). He is also fiercely loyal to the truth, and with him there are no "gray areas", all is black and white. He will expose error irrespective of who is offended (1 Jn. 1:6, 8; 2:4, 22), yet his admonitions are not done in a cold "I'm right and you are wrong" or "This is the way we do it" attitude, but, as the "apostle of love" (Jn. 13:23; 1 Jn. 2:5-6).
- 4) The external evidence comes from a number of the early church fathers who accepted this as the work of John the apostle. Men such as Papias (c. 140), Polycarp (c. 110-120), Clement (c. 144- 215), and Irenaeus (c. 180).

The Recipients

Unlike the book of Galatians which was written to a particular church, and unlike 2nd and 3rd John which are written to individuals, the 1st Epistle John does not specify his readers. This I see as divine overruling, for the truths of 1 John are for every saint of every age.

Why Was It Written?

As mentioned, the saints to whom John wrote were facing very serious inroads of error. What those were can be detected in viewing his first epistle as a book which gives answers to questions concerning Christ and the christian life. Satan has his ministers as "angels of light" (2 Cor. 11:14), but John speaks very clearly, they are called "antichrist" (1 Jn. 2:18) and "false prophets" (1 Jn. 4:1).

- 1) They denied that:
 - a) Jesus was the Christ, and John states what they are in character (1 Jn. 2:18, 22; 4:3).
 - b) Jesus has or will come in the flesh, Christ is a spirit, a consciousness, and he calls them what they are (2 Jn. 1:7).
 - c) Due to thoughts of their own enlightenment, they have superior knowledge. To this he answers (1 Jn. 2:6, 26-27).
 - d) They argued that what was done in the body of flesh was of no account since it did not affect the spirit. To this he answers (1 Jn. 2:9; 3:10-12; 3:17, 18; 4:8).
 - e) They denied apostolic authority. To this he answers (1 Jn. 4:6).
 - f) The defeat of Satan by the work of the Lord (1 Jn. 3:8).
 - g) The reality of sin within, and sins by action, to this he answers (1 Jn. 1:6, 8,10), and declaring that those who teach this are making God to be a liar (1 Jn. 1:6, 8,10).
 - h) They profess love but are void of it. To this he answers in (1 Jn. 2:9; 3:10-12, 15, 17, 18; 4:8).
 - i) They are a separatist company having no fellowship with those who hold apostolic doctrine (1 Jn. 1:18-19; 4:1).

Keys

1) Key Words

Key Word	No. of Occurrences	1 st Reference	Last Reference
Gk. "Martureo" translated "witness and its associates"	7 times in 7 verses	Ch. 1:2	Ch. 5:10
Truth	10 times in 9 verses	Ch. 1:6	Ch. 5:6
I write	7 times in 6 verses	Ch. 2:1	Ch. 2:13
We write	2 times in 2 verses	Ch. 1:4	Ch. 2:1
I have written	4 times in 4 verses	Ch. 2:4	Ch. 5:13
He that saith	3 times in 3 verses	Ch. 2:4	Ch. 2:9
If we say	3 times in 3 verses	Ch. 1:6	Ch. 1:10
World	23 times in 17 verses	Ch. 2:2	Ch. 5:19
Light	6 times in 5 verses	Ch. 1:5	Ch. 2:10
Gk. "Ginosko, translated as: "Know" and its associates	25 times in 21 verses	Ch. 2:3	Ch. 5:20
Eido translated "know" and its associates	18 times in 15 verses	Ch. 2:11	Ch. 5:20
Love / loveth	41 times in 31 verses	Ch. 2:5	Ch. 5:3
Commandment	7 times in 5 verses	Ch. 2:7	Ch. 4:21
Righteous / righteousness	8 times in 7 verses	Ch. 2:1	Ch. 3:12
Dwell/ dwelleth/ remain/ continue	9 times in 8 verses	Ch. 2:24	Ch. 4:16
Gk. " akouo" translated as Hear / heareth / heard	14 times in 12 verses	Ch. 1:1	Ch. 5:15

2) The Key ideas

- a) There is propitiation for the world. (Ch. 2:2)
- b) The world has an undeniable attractiveness. (Ch. 2:16)
- c) The attitude of the world is hatred against the truth of God and His children. (Ch. 2:13)
- d) The world and its appetites. (Ch. 3:5)
- e) The world is under the authority of the evil one (lieth in wickedness). (Ch. 5:10)

Inter-Relationship Between John's Writings

1) The five books in John are divided into three distinct groups: his gospel, epistles, and the Revelation.

The Gospel	The Epistles	The Revelation
History	Expository	Prophecy
In the world (Jn. 1:10)	In the life (1 Jn. 4:16)	In Heaven (Rev. 4-5)
Past	Present	Future
Life received (Jn. 3:36)	Life revealed (1 Jn. 2:29)	Life rewarded (Rev. 22:12)
Salvation (Jn. 3:16)	Sanctification (1 Jn. 3:3)	Sovereignty (Rev. 4:2)

2) The relationship between John's Gospel and his three Epistles collectively.

John's Gospel	John's 3 Epistles
Historical	Moral
Christ	Christian
Who Christ is (Ch. 20:30-31)	Know that you have life (Ch. 5:13)
That men might believe (Ch. 20:30-31)	To those who believe (Ch. 5:13)
To show the way of life (Ch. 3:16)	To assure those who have life (Ch. 5:9-11)

3) The relationship between John's Gospel and his epistles individually.

The Gospel	1 John	2 John	3 John
The pronouncement of the truth (Jn. 18:37)	The practice of the truth (Ch. 2:29; 3:7 & 10)	The protection of the truth (v. 10)	The proclamation of the truth (v. 7)

4) The relationship between the three epistles.

1 John	2 John	3 John
Fellowship in the family (Ch. 2:12-14)	Fellowship in the home (Ch. 1:10)	Fellowship in the assembly (Ch. 1:6,10)

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The danger of false professions (Ch. 4:1)	The danger of false doctrine (Ch. 1:10)	The danger of false practice (Ch. 1:9-10)
The theme is how to recognize truth and error (Ch. 2:19-23)	That theme is to refuse them who do not teach the truth (Ch. 1:10)	The theme is to encourage those who teach truth (Ch. 1:3)

Structures

No. 1

The believer's enrichment in fellowship with the divine light (Ch. 1:1 – 2:27)

Conditions or Walking In The Light	Hindrances of Walking In The Light
Practical holiness self word (Ch. 1:1 – 2:11)	The grounds of appeal (Ch. 2:12–14)
Complete obedience God-ward (Ch. 2:3–6)	The evils that threatens (Ch. 2:15–23)
Brotherly love man-ward (Ch. 2:7–11)	The secret of safety (Ch. 2:24–27)

The believers attitude when fellowship with divine love (Ch. 2:28–4:21)

The Evils Which Negate Love (Ch. 2:28–4:6)	The Love Which Negates Evil (Ch. 4:7–21)
Since opposing righteousness (Ch. 2:28–3:10a)	The revelation of love (Ch. 4:7–10)
Hate opposing love (Ch. 3:10b–24)	The inspiration of love (Ch. 4:11–16a)
Error opposing truth (Ch. 4:1–6)	The conservation of love (Ch. 4:16b–21)

The believers affinity when in fellowship with divine life (Ch. 5:1–20)

The Blessing of Eternal Life	The Confidences of Eternal Life
The possession of eternal life (Ch. 5:1–12)	The confidence of eternal life (Ch. 5:13–20)
The bond of possession, faith (Ch. 5:1–5)	The boldness of spiritual activity (Ch. 5:13–17)
The proof of possession, witness (Ch. 5:6–12)	The certainty of spiritual knowledge (Ch. 5:18–20)

No. 2

The three major sections and their contrasting beginnings and endings.

Section	2nd Section	3rd Section
Ch. 1:1 - 2:29	3:1 - 4:6	4:7 - 5:21
It begins with a manifestation of the life of God (Ch. 1:1–2)	It begins with a manifestation of the Son and the children of God (Ch. 3:2–3a)	It begins with a manifestation of the love of God (Ch. 4:7–9)
It ends with a warning against false Christ's (Ch. 2:18–29)	It ends with a warning against false spirits (Ch. 4:1–6)	It ends with a warning against false gods (Ch. 5:21)
Fellowship with God's light and the dangers of darkness.	Fellowship with God who is Love and the danger of hatred.	Fellowship with God who is true and the danger of idolatry.

No. 3

The internal construction based on similarity of truths (Companion Bible)

- 1) The Word of life, eternal life, Ch. 1:1–2)
 - a) Fellowship with God and his Son (Ch. 1:3–4)
 - i) The question of sin in ourselves (Ch. 1:5–2:2)
 1. Obedience to God (Ch. 2:3–11)
 - (a) Overcoming the world (Ch. 2:12–17)
 - (i) The spirit of Antichrist and the Holy Spirit (Ch. 2:18–29)
 - (1) God's love is manifested to us, changing us into His likeness at His appearing and even now (Ch. 3:1–10)
 - a. Love one another, do not kill (Ch. 3:11–15)
 - (i) He laid down his life for us (Ch. 3:16)
 - (ii) We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren (Ch. 3:16)
 - b. Love one another, don't be stingy (Ch. 3:16)
 - (2) Gods love manifested through us, we are changed into his likeness with this presence and now (Ch. 3:19–24)
 - (ii) The Holy Spirit and the spirit of Antichrist (Ch. 4:1–21)
 - (b) Overcoming the world (Ch. 5:1–8)
 2. Believing God (Ch. 5:9–15)
 - ii) The question of sin in others (Ch. 5:16–18)
 - b) Fellowship with God and his Son (Ch. 5:19)
- 2) The Son of God, and eternal life (Ch. 5:20–21)

Thoughts On The Various Truths Mentioned

- 1) Light and Love
 - a) Christianity is a "faith" religion, for it teaches that the individual is saved by faith (Eph. 2:8-9) and such "walk (live) by faith" (2 Cor. 5:7). That does not mean it is a non practical religion for the twin truths of "light and love" are not just an intellectual truths of christianity but they are the practical tests of christianity.

- b) Humanity always reverses the ways of God, for instance he will speak of “body, soul and spirit” but the scriptures speak of “spirit and soul and body” (1 Thess. 5:23). Being such man will put great emphasis on the fact that “God is love” and ask “How could a God of love send anyone to Hell” They fail to see that before God is ever spoken of as God is love He is manifested as “God is Light” (1 Jn. 1:5; 4:8, 16).

2) Love’s

- a) Direction - it is toward us (Ch. 4:9)
- b) Intention - it is to us (Ch. 4:16)
- c) Habitation - it is in us (Ch. 2:15; 3:17)
- d) Perfection - it is with us (Ch. 4:18)

3) Love’s Characteristics

- a) The essential character of His love: “He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.” (1 Jn. 4:8)
- b) The cause of His love: “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (1 Jn. 4:10)
- c) The reciprocal character of His love: “He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love” (1 Jn. 4:8)
- d) The fulness of His love: “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” (1 Jn. 3:1-2)
- e) The Perfection of His love: “Perfect love casteth out fear.” (1 Jn. 4:18)
- f) The maturity of his love in us: “But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.” (1 Jn. 2:5)

4) Faith

- a) The first epistle of John is an advancement on the gospel. John writes: “But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (Jn. 20:31). That is to give a foundation to faith. Then in his first epistle he writes: “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God” (1 Jn. 5:13). This is for the establishment of their faith.

5) Eternal life

- a) Many years ago in Belfast the believers pitched a large gospel tent. Above the platform on a banner were the words: “Heaven or Hell for eternity, *which*”. Only those who have eternal life are going to heaven, and this leads to the question: “How do I know if I have eternal life?” Interestingly he does not ask for “a time when, a manner how, and a place where”, he deals with a matter far more sure and comforting. Let me illustrate: if I were in front of you, how would you know if I was alive or not?” Not by the giving of a date, but because I have the characteristics of life manifested in this body! It is the same with eternal life, for while most people can say when, where and how; it is not a necessity, for eternal life is manifested by the life.
- b) I am aware it is sometimes said: “The Blood makes us secure, the book makes us sure” which is very nice, but it is more assuring when there is some tangible evidence. God gave the Children of Israel tangible experiences, a real life experience at the Red Sea. He does the same for us. Not only do we have the scriptures but also real tests which John now enumerates for me. They are in the form of seven questions:
 - i) In which sphere do I live, darkness or light? (Ch. 1:5-2:1) A contrast of moral qualifications.

- ii) What do I live for, that which is restricted to time or the Father? (Ch. 2:3-17) A contrast of moral realities.
 - iii) Are my beliefs concerning Christ from Christ or antichrist? (Ch. 2:18-2:27) A contrast of persons.
 - iv) In the evaluation of God, are my works “good or evil?” (Ch. 2:28-3:24) A contrast of behavior.
 - v) Am I responsive to the Holy Spirit or false spirits?” (Ch. 4:1-4:6) A contrast of spirits.
 - vi) Is the love I have for all the saints or is it pious pretense?” (Ch. 4:7-4:21) A contrast of attitude.
 - vii) Am I born of God or not? (Ch. 5:1-21) A contrast of birth
- c) On this point, four questions must be considered:
- i) Is there a difference between “eternal life and everlasting life?”
 - 1. The answer is “No”. Both are used in the same context. (Jn. 3:15-17; Lk. 18:30; Matt. 19:29)
 - ii) Is there a difference between “eternal life” and “life eternal / everlasting?”
 - 1. If there is, it is simply a difference in emphasis with one indicating the duration of the life, and the other the quality of life.
 - iii) Is there a difference between “living forever and eternal life?”
 - 1. The answer is “Yes”. The unsaved will live forever, eternally, but do not have eternal life. Had man eaten of the tree of life he would have lived forever (Gen. 3:22). Hell is not just an existence. Those who are there, and will be there, will live forever and will never die physically, although they have died spiritually.
 - iv) What is eternal / everlasting life?
 - 1. It is more than being alive for evermore. Eternal life is a quality of life. Our Lord said: “This is life eternal that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent” (Jn. 17:3).
- 6) Sin and Forgiveness
- a) The definition of sin. We are inclined to use words without differentiating, but God never does. When God speaks of “transgression” it means stepping beyond the law, it is failing to come up to the law. When we see how holy God is and how rebellious we are, there is the need for forgiveness which:
 - i) God alone can do: “And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying . . . Who can forgive sins, but God alone?” (Lk. 5:21)
 - ii) God in mercy does it: “And refused to obey, neither were mindful of thy wonders that thou didst among them; but hardened their necks, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their bondage: but thou [art] a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsookest them not”. (Neh. 9:17)
 - iii) God does it abundantly: “Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon”. (Isa. 55:7)
- 7) Christ
- a) John’s writings are saturated with the person of the Lord, for how could one who lay in His bosom ever be anything other than delighting in His fulness. John wrote:
 - i) Some of His offices:
 - 1. Advocate (Ch. 2:1)
 - 2. Propitiation (Ch. 2:2)
 - 3. Saviour (Ch. 4:14)

- ii) Some of His works:
 - 1. Destroyer (Ch. 3:8)
 - 2. Example (Ch. 3:16)
 - 3. Life Giver (Ch. 4:9)

 - iii) Some of His titles:
 - 1. Word of Life (Ch.1:1)
 - 2. Eternal Life (Ch. 1:2)
 - 3. Son (Ch. 5:5)
 - 4. Jesus Christ (Ch. 2:1)

 - iv) Some of His experiences:
 - 1. His incarnation (Ch. 4:2)
 - 2. His sinless life (Ch. 3:5)
 - 3. His crucifixion (Ch. 3:16)
 - 4. His second advent (Ch. 2:28)
- 8) God
- a) God is Light, therefore all must be in conformity to his character (Ch. 1:1-2:29)
 - b) God is Love, and love is jealous for the honour and glory of another (Ch. 3:1-5:21)
 - c) When we see this, it becomes a very practical epistle, with us abiding in God's light (ch 1:5) and his love (ch 4:16).
- 9) Fellowship (the following are some of the verses)
- a) Fellowship with God results in joy (Ch. 1:4)
 - b) Fellowship with God results in victory (Ch. 2:13-14)
 - c) Fellowship with God results in watchfulness (Ch. 2:15-29)
 - d) Fellowship with God results in knowledge (Ch. 2:27-29)

**May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.
John 16:13**

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