

Gleaners Bible Studies B 6

A LETTER OF LOVE – Studies in 1 John

Study 1

An Introduction

Read

1 John 1: 1 – 4

We are going to study a very lovely part of the New Testament. I remember someone describing the Bible as God's love letter to men. In God's Word, the fact of His love is illustrated in many ways and when we come to the end of these studies, I think you will say that this first letter of John is indeed a love letter.

May I suggest that you do three things before you begin to study:

1. Read the letter right through, at one sitting, if possible.
2. Underline in your Bible, or make a note in your notebook, of the words that keep recurring in the letter.
3. Especially make a note of what the letter says about the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you do these things, it will help you get a fuller picture of what John wanted us to learn.

John has been called the 'Apostle of love'. This is not said in a sentimental way. John referred to himself as the disciple "**whom Jesus loved**". (**John 13: 23**) As you study this epistle you will see that he is completely satisfied with the wonderful fact of God's love. It is generally agreed that he was the writer of the Gospel of John, the three letters which bear his name and also the Book of the Revelation. By the time he wrote this letter we are studying, he was an old man. It is one of the latest writings of the New Testament, and certainly one of the most important. You will see as you study these lessons that one of the main reasons for them being written was to counteract the waves of wrong doctrine which were beginning to erode Christian belief. By the time John wrote this, there were many strong features of error being taught in opposition to Christianity.

The first four verses of **chapter 1** are an introduction to the main subjects dealt with in the book. You will find, if you read carefully, that many of the words used in this introduction are repeated throughout the letter. We begin with three main thoughts:

1. The **Word** of Life (**verse 1**)
2. The **Word** declared (**verse 2**)
3. The **Word** shared (**verses 3-4**)

1. THE WORD OF LIFE (verse 1)

John begins his first letter, just as he did his Gospel, by introducing us to the Lord Jesus Christ. In **John 1: 1** he calls Him "**The Word**". Here, in the first epistle, he describes him as the "**Word of LIFE**". He tells us of that which was "**from the beginning**". Notice this carefully because in **John 1: 1** he speaks of "**In the beginning**". John wants us to be absolutely convinced of the true manhood of Jesus. The Lord Jesus, was to him, the dearest friend in the world and he walked very closely with Him. But here, and in other places in this letter, he stresses the fact that the Lord Jesus was God, as well as man, and that He is ETERNAL in His very nature. He is man, yet more than a man. He is the "**Word of Life**", the One who makes known to us the life of God. I suggest that you read **John 1: 1 – 18** carefully as you study these four verses. However long ago "**the beginning**" was, Jesus was there and always existed as the Word – God's Son.

You will find other passages in the New Testament, which confirm the fact of the pre-existence of the Lord Jesus – the great truth that He is Eternal. Consider **John 8: 58** "**Before Abraham was I AM**". Here Jesus Himself affirms that He had existence long before Abraham's time. See also **John 17: 24** "**For You loved Me before the foundation of the world**". Also **John 17: 5**. These emphasise again that the Lord Jesus looked back to a time when He was with the Father, even before the world was made. Now look at **Colossians 1: 16-17** where it speaks of all things being created by Him and for Him, "**And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist**". He is the maker of all things as **John 1** says, and "**before all things**". Make a note and look out for other similar passages, e.g. **Hebrews 1: 1 – 3**. It is essential that you let the Bible speak for itself.

2. THE WORD DECLARED (verse 2)

"**The Life was manifested**", or "**appeared**". It is wonderful how John accepts the coming of the Lord Jesus into the world as something that was planned. You will notice that he speaks of this life as ETERNAL LIFE and of that which was WITH the Father. It is important to notice this because later on in the letter, he will tell us that "**the Father has sent the Son as Saviour of the world**". (**1 John 4: 14**)

But now he is telling us that this wonderful life was manifested. It was seen, and because John had seen the Lord Jesus, he was able to give witness to Him. Always remember that what we are actually told about the Lord Jesus, came from those who lived with Him and had learned to love Him too. This is the definition of a true witness. John writes about someone whom he had both seen and heard, and even touched. Jesus was REAL to him. It is important to know just what kind of life belonged to the Lord Jesus as a man. Look at **1 Timothy 3: 16**, "**without controversy, great is the MYSTERY of Godliness**." Usually when the New Testament speaks of a mystery, it does not mean mysterious in the sense of being linked with fantasy. It is something that had previously been HIDDEN, but now was REVEALED. That is just what happened when Jesus came into the world. So that when men looked at Him and saw His character, works, and ways, they were seeing God Himself. It is good to notice that John said, "**THE LIFE**", the all-embracing thought of what life really is, was revealed in the person of Jesus Christ.

3. THE WORD SHARED (verses 3 – 4)

The WORD shared. I have chosen this heading because I want you to get the idea of fellowship. John could not keep this good news to himself. What he had seen and heard, he passed on to others. Those who received and read this letter then, and we who read it today, can have fellowship in this wonderful revelation. And because we enter into all that the coming of Christ into the world means, "**our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ**". We share all that God IS through Christ and we share His love with others.

No wonder John could say, "**that your joy may be full**". To understand and enter into just the things that these four verses tell us, can bring us the joy of knowing for ourselves the Lord Jesus Christ – the Word of Life - and declaring Him and sharing Him with others.

So this section ends on a wonderful note. The revelation of God in the Lord Jesus links us with the Father and eventually links us into fellowship with all who believe in Him.

Study 2

"This is the Message"

Read

1 John 1: 5 – 2: 6

You will find in these studies that we cannot consider all the truths dealt with by John in his letter. This means that you will be able to note some other things, while you are reading, for your own private study. I hope you will find them a real spiritual blessing. This is the satisfying part about the Bible – there is always something more to learn, no matter how much you know.

We begin by looking at an important announcement. John says to us, **"This is the message (announcement) which we have heard from Him and declare to you". (1: 5)** It holds a vital place in the teaching of this letter. It is a great fact about God – **"God is LIGHT"**. Notice this is not just something that God HAS or DOES, but something that He IS! It would be good at this point for you to take a piece of paper and write down every idea you associate with light. Then against this, jot down everything you associate with darkness. Now, John says, **"God is light and in Him is no darkness at all."** To put it simply, we can say that every aspect of purity and truth, justice and right – everything that is the opposite of sin and degradation and evil – these things belong to God's nature.

There is something about light that is warm and inviting. But there is also that about it, which can be intense and forbidding. I want you to learn from this that no sin can ever dwell in God's presence. There is something about Him that makes it impossible for unrighteousness to exist in the light of His absolute holiness. And because God is so pure, He can penetrate everything that is sinful in us and make us conscious of our wrongdoing. If you want an illustration of this, look at **Isaiah 6: 1 – 7**. Isaiah as a young man saw in a vision the Lord and His throne. He heard those tremendous words, **"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts"**. (verse 3) Suddenly he felt defiled and dirty – he was completely undone. Think carefully about this great fact relating to God and His nature. It has meaning and significance for us today.

We are now going to look at three important points regarding SIN and the life of the Christian. You will notice that three times John says, **"If we say..."**, (verses 6, 8, 10) He implies from these verses that we need to be very careful what we say, for some of these things could be very far from the truth.

1. "If we say" — Walking in the light. (verses 6 and 7)

John says here that it is easy to say we are living in harmony with God, yet to be taking a wrong course in life. Notice here again the contrast between light and darkness. To be able to say that I am in fellowship with God, means that the course I take in life must be right. Often we compare our lives with others, and possibly we feel we are not too bad. But to compare our lives with God's absolute PURITY is so different. Yet, says John, to walk in the light as God is, means to find the CLEANSING of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ for our sin and darkness. This is wonderful.

We need to get the full force of this statement. When we first become Christians, it is the blood of Jesus Christ that sets us free from our sins. (**Ephesians 1: 7**) Also as Christians, when the darkness of sin spoils our friendship with God, it is the same precious blood that renews us and makes us clean. In this way we can have fellowship with other Christians as well. So, be careful what you say about walking in the light! If we say we walk in the light, it will show in our growing relationships with our fellow-Christians and non-Christians. It will be a growing LOVE.

2. "If we say" – We have no sin. (verses 8 & 9)

Here is a saying of self-deception. Would YOU say this? Could you look into your own life and say that there is no underlying principle of sin there? In John's day, just as in our day, there were people who were teaching erroneous theories about the origins of sin and evil. The writer of this letter makes the truth concerning sin very clear. The possibility of committing sin, is present in us all and will be until we are finished with this earthly life.

Notice these three points:

- a) **Chapter 3 verse 4** *Sin is lawlessness*
- b) **Chapter 3 verse 6** *"Whoever sins has neither seen Him (God) nor known Him"*
- c) **Chapter 3 verse 8** *"He who sins is of the devil."*

But instead of self-deception, **1: 9** shows us the way of CONFESSION and FORGIVENESS. To recognise my sin and confess it before God is to prove His readiness to forgive and cleanse from all unrighteousness. It is good to keep short reckonings with God. Each day we live we need to confess how defiled we become. Be careful what you say about your sin. **Psalm 51** will tell you much about confession and forgiveness.

3. "If we say" - We have not sinned. (verse 10)

Not only can we say false things about the ROOT of sin in us, we can profess wrongly about the FRUIT of sin – our actions. Here we make God to be untrue. Read **chapter 2 verses 1 – 3** carefully. God recognises that we can do wrong even AFTER we become Christians. He is very loving and sympathetic, although He does not want us to fail and fall into sin. **Chapter 2 verse 1** tells us that if we do sin, **we have an ADVOCATE with the Father, "Jesus Christ the Righteous"**. This makes it clear that when I fail, there is One to plead my cause before God, who is my Father. So that if I do make mistakes, and I often shall, I need not despair. Remember, God has made it possible for all of us to overcome sin. Yet, if we fall – what then? In the Lord Jesus Christ and His precious blood, we can find cleansing and forgiveness. How much better then to face sin and confess it rather than to try to hide it – we can never hide it from the all-seeing eye of God.

As a closing thought there is something else that comes over to us in John's teaching regarding SIN. We are confronted with the fact that sin must be judged in the Presence of God. Like David, so many centuries before, we have to say, **"Against You, You only, have I sinned."** (**Psalm 51: 4**) Sin makes us unhappy. It causes unhappiness and leads often to disaster. But its seriousness on earth, is nothing compared with God's estimate of it in Heaven. That is why John stresses the need of complete and utter sincerity before God when we deal with it, and seek forgiveness. Keep short accounts with God!

Study 3

"A New Commandment"

Read

1 John 2: 7 – 17

We have called this letter a 'letter of love'. It is mainly that, but it is really built around three great words that John always loved, Light, Love and Life. Somehow, as he looked at God and His wonderful character, these three truths came to him time and time again. I am sure you will get many helpful thoughts from studying the use of these three great words.

In our last lesson we have already studied Light. This word really dominates the first chapter, for **"God is LIGHT"**. When we come to **Chapter 4 verse 16** we shall read, **"God is LOVE"**, and then in **Chapter 5** at the end of the letter, we shall see that **"God is LIFE"** – Life Eternal. While we can never grasp all that God

is, these words, which are so closely linked with life, help us to understand more easily what He can mean to us.

Notice that the first mention of Love is in **Chapter 2 verse 5** ***"Whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him"***. I think this links Light and Love together. Think about this! If we keep God's Word, we shall be able to live in the light, and we are living in the light, then no sin will be possible. But in this, John tells us; God's love will be enjoyed and developed. I think this does remind us of the words of the Lord Jesus in **John 14: 23** ***"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word"***. Our study now is going to deal with two great facts about our love.

1. **Chapter 2: 7 & 10** Who we should love. ***"Love one another."***
2. **Chapter 2: 15 & 17** What we should NOT love. ***"Do not Love the world."***

1. "LOVE ONE ANOTHER"

This subject belongs very much to this letter. Look through the passages that deal with it. (2: 7–11; 3: 11–18; 3: 23 & 24; 4: 7–12; 4: 19–21) Of course, in John's teaching about love, we get the confirmation of the first two commandments of God. Love first toward God, then love towards others. How important these are! Christians are enabled to really put these into practice through Christ and His power. I am sure, as John was writing this letter; his mind went back over many years to the night when he sat beside the Master whom he loved so much. He remembered the words of Jesus, ***"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, as I have loved you... By this all will know that you are my disciples, if ye have love one for another."*** (John 13: 34 & 35) Such words, coming from the lips of the Saviour, could never be forgotten. Notice how they are linked with walking in the light.

- a) Hatred is united with darkness. Therefore it is no good to say that we walk in the light if we hate our fellow-Christians. This is hypocrisy. Notice how clear John's thinking is, ***"He ... is in darkness until now,"*** (verse 9) To be in such a condition is to be out of harmony with God. We can easily be trapped into thinking that relationships are not as important as the truths we believe. Thus we speak of being in the light because we know certain things. But behaviour toward others, betrays our true standing – whether we walk in the light or in darkness. Think about this carefully.
- b) **Verse 10** takes us a step further. If we love our fellow Christians we not only walk in the light, we abide in the light as well. ***"Abide"*** is one of John's favourite words. It has the thought of continuance in it. Some translate this word, 'to be at home'. This is lovely! To be at home in the light means that we have nothing to be ashamed of. If you apply this to relationships between Christians, you can see how important this is. Fellowship is a very precious thing and can easily be broken. Abiding in the light means healthy Christian living.
- c) Now look at **verse 11**. Here is a sad effect of hatred or lack of love between Christians. This condition 'blinds'. John paints the picture of someone whose whole outlook on Christian life becomes distorted. Such a person does not know which way to go. A resentful, jealous, unloving spirit can spoil everything. It is like a spiritual mist that gathers and thickens until the light of God is shut out. It seems that John implies here that any distortion is possible if we do not love one another. Worst of all, God is dishonoured and we lose that sense of His presence.

2. "DO NOT LOVE THE WORLD"

I will leave you to study **verses 12 – 14** for yourselves. John tells us in these verses why he wrote his letter, and also the characters of those to whom he wrote. He had a message for ***"little children"*** – those who were dear to Him; for ***"fathers"*** – mature Christians who had a deeper knowledge through experience; for ***"young men"*** – those who were becoming

robust and strong through the Word of God. Notice what John says about each point that he stresses.

- a) He commands, very definitely that Christians should have no love for the world. That is, its systems, its policies and its philosophies. We tend to think we can please ourselves about this. The Lord makes it clear that we are not of the world, although we are in it. (**John 17: 14 – 16**) He looked upon the influences of the world as things which would spoil the Christian life.
- b) To love the world is to have no love for the Father. It is very true that the more I am involved in the pursuits of this world, the less real love I can know for my Father. James goes as far as to say that ***"whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God"***. (**James 4: 4**) We cannot serve two masters – the world and Christ.
- c) We are sure to ask the question: 'What is meant by worldliness; by loving the world?' Probably, you think that if you do not drink, or smoke, or dance, or gamble, you are not worldly. I think that it goes much deeper than this. Satan is, ***"the god of this age..."*** (**2 Corinthians 4: 4**) and he controls it. Here we read of desires through the eyes, desires of the flesh, and the pride or vainglory of life. Every desire in my life which Satan can use to take me away from my love for God, can be described as 'worldly'. It is not so much the PLACE, or even the PLEASURES that John refers to. It is the PRINCIPLES or the world which can control us, that John is emphasising.

We end with the reflection that, everything associated with the world is passing away, or transient. We cannot depend upon it. Everything that we can enjoy in it, however attractive it may seem, lasts only for a short while. Many people have proved this in reality. How much better to do God's will and obey Him? We shall abide forever because everything associated with God and His love is eternal.

Study 4 The Perils of the Antichrist

1 John 2: 18 – 29

I hope you have noticed in these studies the way John has dealt with some real 'dangers to progress' in a Christian's life. There was the peril of self-deception, and the sadness that sin could produce. There was the awfulness of the lack of love to other Christians. Then the perils of temptation that the world offers to the Christian. Always remember that if these problems are stated, then the solution to them can be sought for and found. God intends us to be strong, healthy, Christians, and He never makes us aware of the difficulties without showing us the solution. The Christian life is essentially a life of progression, but there is no progress without problems, yet problems can be solved!

In our present study we look at something very serious. It is the peril of ANTICHRIST. In your study of the New Testament, you will find that it is only John who uses this word and I am sure he had a definite reason for doing so. 'Antichrist' literally means "against Christ" and it speaks of those who, in their teaching, oppose the truth related to the Lord Jesus and all that He stands for. It is obvious that even in John's time this was beginning to present problems. There were actually false teachers who were very active. Some of them were called Gnostics. They professed to have knowledge about life and its mysteries. Among their teachings were false doctrines that were against Christ, or 'antichrist' in their form. John warns very definitely of their danger, because he realised that to be wrong in relation to the Lord Jesus, means that we are certain to be wrong in everything else.

We can pause here and reflect that Satan uses many ways of attacking a Christian's faith. He will never give up, and among

his subtle arts are those that begin right at the centre of Christian teaching, and these are to be watched for and dealt with most carefully.

In this study, I want you to concentrate your thoughts around four words that John uses:

Antichrist – Anointing – Abide – Appearing

1. ANTICHRIST - (2: 18)

Beware of those who will lead you astray, that is what John is saying. For 'to be warned is to be forearmed'. This means that Satan will not be content merely to attack your faith, but he will attack the OBJECT of your faith – the Lord Jesus Himself. Note that John speaks of the *"last time"* or the *"last hour"*. He felt sure that the coming of these wicked deceivers was a strong indication that the coming of the Lord Jesus was near. What about in our day? His coming must surely be much nearer! Think about this as you compare with **1 Timothy 4: 1-3**. Where did these deceivers come from? Look at **2: 19** for it says something very serious. *"They went out from us"* so they were 'in amongst' the Christians, but they were not 'of' them – not really born-again Christians. 'Of' would indicate 'not of the same nature or birth'. I wonder if you see that Satan can operate from among Christians! Very often we just do not appreciate Satan's subtlety. You see the meaning of 'antichrist' is someone who poses as Christ, or rather in place of Christ, even demanding the worship that belongs to Christ – yet opposing everything that Christ is and stands for. This is Satan's 'fifth column' – the ENEMY WITHIN!

2. ANOINTING. - (2: 20)

Look at **verses 20 – 24**. One wonderful fact comes out in these verses. However cunning Satan is, we need never be led astray. *"You have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know..."* (2: 20) What does this mean? It tells us that, through the Holy Spirit and His work in our lives, our minds can be instructed about Christ. Christ said, *"He... the Holy Spirit will teach you all things..."* (John 14: 26) When we are at school or college, our instructor teaches us all about the subjects we study. So God, through His Holy Spirit and His Word, will teach us all we need to know. In this way we learn so much of the Lord Jesus and His work, that Satan need never deceive us. Notice especially that in **John 16: 7-14**, when the Lord Jesus was describing the Holy Spirit, He called Him the Spirit of Truth. Read this passage carefully. So John tells us to let the things that the Spirit reveals to us, grip us and make us strong in our knowledge and faith.

3. ABIDE - (2: 28)

Here, and in **verse 24** we find this word again! What we hear and learn from God's Word must dwell in, or take over, our lives. Be careful you are not too casual about the things that you study and learn. **James 1** speaks about a forgetful hearer of the Word. He also speaks about unstable Christians. We need to abide in the truth, and also to let the truth abide in us. Then again, we need to *"ABIDE IN HIM"*. (2: 27-28) *"Abiding in Him"* will show us what true 'worldliness' is. It will show us what is right and what is wrong in all matters of life and progress in the Christian experience. Satan will never be able to touch those who safely dwell in the love and care of the Lord Jesus Christ. See also **John 15**.

4. APPEARING - (2: 28)

John ends this passage with a great incentive to faithfulness. *"Abide in Him, that when He appears we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming"*. The Lord Jesus is coming again. When He comes, we shall be challenged, I am sure, as to the way in which we have lived and held the things God has given us. If you want to be happy about the coming again of the Lord Jesus and be really looking forward to it, then BE TRUE to the things that God teaches you. Obedient Christians must certainly be the happiest Christians alive!

Questions

Study 1

AN INTRODUCTION

1. Which aspect of John's character is seen in all his writings? Give examples.
2. What was John's main purpose in writing this Epistle?
3. What fact concerning the Lord Jesus, does John especially emphasise in these verses?
4. Give two verses of Scripture where Jesus affirms His own eternal existence.
5. a) What does the New Testament mean when it speaks of a "mystery"?
b) Give one example of a mystery that was revealed.

Study 2

"THIS IS THE MESSAGE"

1. a) What important announcement does John make in this passage?
b) What aspect of God's character does it emphasise?
2. Three times in these verses John uses the same phrase. What is he trying to emphasise?
3. What kind of life must I live in order to be in fellowship with God?
4. If my fellowship with God is spoiled through sin, how can it be renewed?
5. What work is the Lord Jesus presently engaged in, on behalf of all Christians?

Study 3

"A NEW COMMANDMENT"

1. a) Which two themes are closely linked in this passage?
b) What are the two main exhortations in this passage?
2. Give two effects that are caused through a lack of love between Christians.
3. What effect will the influences of the world have upon a Christian's life?
4. What would you say was John's definition of 'worldliness'?
5. There is a much better and more satisfying course for a Christian to take. What is it?

Study 4

THE PERILS OF ANTICHRIST

1. When we meet problems along the way, how does God help us to progress in the Christian life?
2. What is the meaning of the term 'Antichrist'?
3. a) Who is our Divine Instructor in things relating to Christ?
b) Why is the Holy Spirit called the Spirit of Truth?
4. How can we be ready to meet the Lord Jesus without being ashamed at His coming?
5. What is the most important lesson you have learned from the study of this Epistle?