

Gleaners Bible Studies B 7

A LETTER OF LOVE – Studies in 1 John

Study 1

“Children of God”



1 John 3

This chapter is a very full one, so you DO need to read it carefully. It deals with so much that is vital in Christian living. It brings us teaching which is very practical and relevant to our everyday lives as Christians.

We often hear people say these days, ‘it doesn’t really matter what we believe as long as we are sincere about it’ but this sentiment has no place in the Apostle John’s thinking. We cannot even enter into what John is saying in this chapter, until we are sure that we are ‘in the family’.

Remember, we are talking about the “*children of God*”- those who are in God’s family. We are bound to be reminded of **John 1: 12**, “*But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name*”. And **verse 13** goes on to say that they are ‘born of God’. So it is by the new birth (**John 3: 3-6**) that we are born into God’s family. **Galatians 3: 26** puts it this way, “*You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.*” These verses show us how this is possible.

In this study we are going to consider some of those things that mark us out as God’s children. You will notice that there are three different marks of those who are God’s own children.

1. **(3: 1-3)** The Mark of BELONGING to the FATHER.
2. **(3: 4-12)** The Mark of BEHAVIOUR that is WORTHY.
3. **(3: 13-24)** The Mark of BROTHERLY LOVE.

1. BELONGING to the Father.

“*Behold what manner (what kind) of love the Father has bestowed on us*”. (**1 John 3: 1**) This is a great starting point. To be in the family of God is to be within the circle of the Father’s love. And the kind of love that we know and enjoy is the love that makes us the sons or children of God. At this point too, should be added the words ‘and such we are’ – stressing a present and real family situation. This is wonderful! It means that, as a Christian, I enjoy the great blessing of God’s love. We know that in our ordinary everyday lives, love is the basis of our home-life. We cannot really make a home without it. As Christians we can enjoy the very deepest meaning of God’s love. I think of the words of the Lord Jesus, “*As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love*”. (**John 15: 9**) John looks on to the time when the Lord Jesus will come again. He says that “*we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is.*” (**1 John 3: 2**) the family will then be complete. This is the hope of every Christian.

2. BEHAVIOUR that is Worthy.

Verse 3 leads us into a very important section. It says that to have the hope of the coming of the Lord Jesus in front of us, means that we shall be careful to live lives that are pure and free from sin. So down to **verse 12** we see how children of God should behave. Sin should be a foreign thing altogether to the Christian. Notice how John describes it:

Verse 4 Transgression of the law - “*lawlessness*”.

Verse 6 “*Whoever sins has neither seen Him (God) nor known Him*”.

Verse 8 “*He who sins is of the devil*”.

Verse 10 “*Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God*”.

John makes it very clear that the Lord Jesus came into the world for the purpose of doing two great things in relation to sin.

Verse 5 “*... He was manifested to take away our sins; and in Him there is NO SIN*”

Verse 8 “*For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil*”

How vital that is! Sin DESCRIBED – Sin DEALT WITH. God has done everything necessary to put sin out of the life of the Christian. WE NEED NOT – SHOULD NOT sin. You may ask if this means that a Christian becomes perfect after conversion.

Look at two verses:

Verse 6 “*Whoever abides in Him does not sin.*”

Verse 9 “*Whoever has been born of God does not sin,.... and he cannot sin, because he is born of God*”.

What does this mean? – It means two things:

- a) The new nature that God gives us is apart from sin. So if this completely possessed us – as it will one day – we would be perfect and never sin again. The trouble is that our old nature is still with us and it causes us to fall into sin over and over again.
- b) If we “*abide*” in the Lord Jesus, that is, allow Him to control our lives, we shall not make sin the PRACTICE of our lives, we shall avoid it. This, according to **verse 10** will mark us out as being different from the world as children of God. Let the Lord Jesus have full control of your life and sin will be defeated more and more.

3. BROTHERLY LOVE.

I think it goes without saying that if we love God the Father, we should love every member of His family. Study these verses carefully. There is so much discord among Christians today; so much lack of love; that we need to pay attention to this! Notice what John says about loving one another as we close our study.

- a) It is the evidence of passing from death to life. (**verse 14**)
- b) We ought to lay down our lives for our brethren. (**verse 16**)
- c) We should not merely love in WORD, “*but in DEED and in TRUTH*”. (**verse 18**)
- d) It is the commandment of God that we should not only believe in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, but we should love one another as well. The one is as important as the other.

Study 2

"We Know"



1 John 4

We have called this first letter of John a 'letter of love'. We could also have called it a letter of **CERTAINTY** or **CONFIDENCE**. The teachings that John expresses are put forward with absolute assurance. He does not apologise for what he says! Neither does he hesitate to state them clearly. One of the 'key-words' of his writings is the word **"KNOW"**. Of course, John was an old man, an experienced, mature Christian. Many years had passed since he had walked with the Lord Jesus. Things that he had heard and seen, he had thought over carefully. The teachings of the early Church had gradually crystallised into the substance of the writings. Now as he writes, he can repeatedly say with confidence, **"we know"**. Have you noted down the references where this phrase occurs? They make a study in themselves. I am sure they will give you, as they have often given me, a sense of the trustworthiness of the conclusions at which John arrives. You will notice his various ways of putting it:

"By this we know" (2: 3; 2: 5; 2: 18; 3: 24)

"You know" (2: 29; 3: 15)

"We know" (3: 2; 3: 14; 4: 16) (have known)

"By this we know" (4: 6)

"That you may know" (5: 13)

These will give you an idea of the way in which John is basing all his reasoning upon reality. If you are a Christian, you can build your whole life and testimony upon that which is sure and certain – that which will never fail. This means that what you gain in your understanding as a Christian is not mere speculation or experiment, but, through the Lord Jesus Christ, satisfying knowledge based on experience of Him.

Before we commence our main study, I want you to realise that second hand knowledge is not sufficient for a truly happy Christian life. We can, of course, share in the knowledge of others and benefit from it. We can talk about the wonderful things that other Christians have discovered. But this is not enough! We must **"KNOW"** God for ourselves. How can this be? The Bible teaches that by prayer and constant reading of God's Word, this personal knowledge can be ours. Make sure then, that you know the things you believe to be true for yourself!

This chapter presents us with two aspects of knowledge:

1. Knowledge that is Essential. 4: 1-6

2. Knowledge to be Enjoyed. 4: 7-21

1. KNOWLEDGE that is Essential. 4: 1-6

Without knowledge life can be dangerous. You may think of many practical ways in which this is true. A secure and happy life must be built upon matters of certainty. In these early verses of **Chapter 4** John speaks of different spirits. By this he is referring to those forms of wrong teaching that were being spread abroad. Even by the time John wrote this letter, much erroneous teaching had grown out of the record of the life and work of the Lord Jesus.

There were those who denied the deity of Christ. There were also those who denied His true manhood. The strong, emphatic language of John used in this Epistle, **"concerning those who try to deceive you" (2: 26)** is designed to establish the believers in the essentials of their faith. Both in his Gospel record and in this Epistle, John emphasises the truth that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

Notice also **4: 1 "Many false prophets (or teachers)**

have gone out into the world". John saw the danger of them coming alongside true Christians and trading their false doctrines. People would listen to all that was said and confusion could result. How then could they know the TRUTH? John gives clear guidance on this matter. Look at what he says in **Chapter 4**.

Verse 2 "Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God".

And conversely

Verse 3 "Every spirit that does not confess that ...is not of God"

This means that those who were teaching the truth would be known by the way in which they treated the fact of the coming into the world of the Lord Jesus. This is still true today! False teachers nearly always go astray on those things concerning the person of Christ and His work of Salvation. John then goes on to say **"he who knows God hears us."** (**Verse 6**) There was every possible indication to know and recognise those who were genuine. "By this **WE KNOW**".

2. KNOWLEDGE to be Enjoyed. (Verses 7-21)

These verses are really the most wonderful in the whole letter. There is so much contained in them that it is difficult to know where to begin. The THEME is clear. **"God is LOVE"** (**Verses 8 and 16**) tell us this. Just as in **Chapter 1 God is LIGHT**, so here He is **LOVE**. To know this is wonderful and it is something we can really enjoy. John says two outstanding things here:

a) **"He who does not love, does not know God; for God is love." (4: 8)** If we do not show love in our lives, how can we say we know a God of love? Notice how John makes clear to us the proof of God's love. When we did not love Him, He loved us. (**Verse 10**) He sent His Son into the world that we might live through Him (**Verse 9**) If we say that we love God, then we must prove it in our lives by loving others. How forceful (**Verse 11**) is! **"If God so loved us, we also ought to love one another"**.

b) **"We have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love... we love Him because He first loved us". (Verses 16-19)** What a wonderful thought this is! It means that once we begin to **KNOW** God's love and find out how real it is, then we can begin to enjoy the blessing it brings. Just as we can bask in the warm rays of the sun, so we can live in the warmth of God's love. If we think of the future – we need not be afraid of God's judgment (**Verse 17**) We can have boldness – courage – because **"His perfect love casts out FEAR"**. (**Verse 18**) We will also, as we get to know more of God's love, learn more deeply what it means to love others as we should.

"We know" John says, and he is right. God wants us to know all those things that are for our security and blessing.

Study 3

"This is the Victory"



1 John 5: 1 – 12

We are getting near to the end of our studies in this letter of love and I hope that you are finding them helpful. We have obviously not been able to deal with everything this Epistle teaches, so if you re-read these chapters in your own personal study time, you will find many more things to help you as a Christian. I like to think of John as a dear old Christian man, with so many years of experience behind him. As he writes, he thinks of all those who will be left to work out the meaning of Christian living after he has gone. He wants to

share with them his experience of Christ. ***"I write to you"*** or ***"I have written to you"*** – these are phrases that repeatedly give a reason for writing, e.g. **2: 1; 2: 12-14; 2: 26**. In this way he would make his readers aware of their perils, privileges and prospects. Many of these readers were young converts who needed to learn the way to live and to grow in spiritual things. Maybe you, too, are young or just beginning your Christian life. A careful reading of these chapters will, I am sure, bring you strength as you seek to live the Christian life each day.

I want us to concentrate our thoughts in this lesson, on the subject of ***"overcoming"*** – the idea of VICTORY. This is something that is essential in order to know real joy and satisfaction as a Christian. If in your life for Christ you are feeling defeated, with a sense of bondage to certain sins in your life, then there is something wrong. Satan just loves to breed despair and frustration in our minds. He will readily tell us that it is no good to struggle for the mastery over our weaknesses. 'Give up the fight' He will urge, 'Why bother?' It will be good if we can learn from this study something of the secret of Victorious Christian Living. Remember God intends us to triumph in Christ, our victorious Saviour.

The word ***"overcome"*** is used four times in these last two chapters of **(1 John)**. Look carefully at these verses.

- a) **4: 4** ***"You are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world"***.
- b) **5: 4** ***"Whatever is born of God overcomes the world"***.
- c) **5: 4** ***"This is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith"***.
- d) **5: 5** ***"Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?"***

Each of these verses has something to teach us.

1. VICTORY within.

"He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world".

(4: 4) Every Christian has the indwelling power of Christ through the Holy Spirit. If we recognise this, our lives can become an impregnable fortress against false teachers with all their cunning, and all the temptations of Satan. The Lord Jesus is within and He is greater than all. Remember, however strong sin and Satan may seem to be, the Lord Jesus is stronger!

Think of what it really means for your life to be the dwelling-place of a victorious Saviour! Paul prayed in **Ephesians 3: 14-21** that the Christians at Ephesus would live in the good of this fact. Read his prayer carefully. So you see, we can think of victory as beginning within. In fact you must begin there. Remind your heart continually that your life is indwelt by the mighty Lord Jesus Himself.

2. VICTORY through life.

"Whatever is born of God overcomes the world". **(5: 4)** This again is an important truth. Because I am a Christian I am made of a different calibre from those who do not know Christ. Is this really so? IT IS! **2 Corinthians 5: 17** tells us that ***"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation: old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new"***. New life in Christ means victory. The new nature of the Christian makes it possible for sin, in all its many forms, to be defeated. The old nature can be put away and the new nature begins to dominate. There are many Scriptures that tell us this, and I suggest that you study carefully **Romans 8: 1-11** and **Colossians 3: 1-17**. They are designed to show us that victory is a matter of LIFE.

3. VICTORY by Faith.

"This is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith". **(5: 4)** This is a wonderful thought! It means that we can gain the victory by believing. The Bible is full of stories of those who were victorious in one way or another through faith

in God. We think of David and his meeting with Goliath the Philistine giant. The odds were against David: the weight of power with Goliath. Yet as David met him, he defied him in the Name of the God of the Armies of Israel, **(1 Samuel 17: 45-47)**. Because David believed God, he was not afraid of the enemy. He gained the victory through faith. And so it is with us today. WHAT we believe, and even more important, WHOM we believe in, makes it possible for us to be overcomers in a world that is utterly opposed to God. Read through this letter again and see what John says about 'believing'. It is one of his important 'key-words'.

4. VICTORY through the SON of GOD.

"Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" **(5: 5)** This is important in our understanding of John's point of view. To him, the vital test of all Christian profession was faith in Christ as the Son of God. When you think about this, it becomes more and more important. If you really believe that Jesus IS the Son of God, then you believe that everything is possible. There is nothing that is beyond our reach, if His power is 'let loose' in our lives. His presence can be something very real to us because as God, He can be with us everywhere. No problem is too great or too difficult to take to Him because as God His knowledge is perfect and He is Master of every situation. These facts pave the way to a Christian life of victory and confidence. We pray that with the guidance of the Holy Spirit you will be able to work out these truths, in a very practical way, in your own life and experience.

Study 4

The Final Certainty



1 John 5: 11-21

I wonder if you have found John's letter easy to read? Perhaps you feel, as so many others have felt, that John does not follow a consecutive line of teaching at any one time, but seems to run several ideas into each other. I always feel that he has so much to say that his thoughts become intermingled. That is why a good method of study in the case of John's writings, is to study the WORDS which make up the whole context of the book. I have found in this way that gradually the whole picture begins to take shape, until we understand all he has to say. Try this method for yourself, if you have not already done so!

We are going to end our studies in this letter on a note of certainty. It is worth a great deal today to be able to be sure of those things in which our confidence is placed. I want to make a very important point as we begin our study. You may be a young Christian who is keen to tell others of your faith in the Lord Jesus. I hope you are and that you will prove the joy of witnessing for Christ. But remember this – you will never convince anyone of any part of your testimony unless you are absolutely certain of it yourself. What you know for yourself you can effectively share with others. I am sure that John had this in mind when he wrote this letter, especially when he came to the end of it. For his final declaration of certainty relates to the vital matter of **ETERNAL LIFE**.

You will notice that he began the letter by reminding us of the fact that when the Lord Jesus came into the world, or ***"was manifested"***, it was the manifestation of ***"that eternal life which was with the Father"***. He describes the Lord Jesus personally as ***"ETERNAL LIFE"***. **(Chapter 1: 1-3)**

This is important. He says little about the subject until we come to these last verses. But we do get the impression right from the start, that if we are going to know **LIFE**, we must find it in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. If we miss this,

then we can be sure that the rest of our final study will have no meaning at all. All assurance regarding eternal life comes from what the Lord Jesus really IS. HIS life must be MINE.

Let us look at the real things which concern eternal life.

1. Something GIVEN

“This is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son”. (5: 11) Eternal life is a **gift** from God. This is the very essence of its certainty. The responsibility of it lies with God. Notice that ***“this life is in His Son”***. When we trust the Lord Jesus for salvation, we become possessors of this wonderful life. This is what John means when he says, ***“He who has the Son has life.”*** (verse 12)

How terrible the alternative – ***“He who does not have the Son of God does not have life”***. The difference between being a Christian and not being a Christian is as clear-cut as that. Yet God GIVES and we RECEIVE. John put all this down in writing so that we could know and be absolutely certain that “everyone who believes in the Name of the Son of God has eternal life”. (verse 13) How great a gift this is! **Romans 6: 23** speaks about ***“the wages of sin”***. We earn death because of our sinfulness. But we can never earn eternal life – it is impossible for sinful people to gain anything from God. No – ***“the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord”***.

2. Something GUARDED

I have used this word because **verses 18 and 19** make clear a very important point. Maybe you have at sometimes wondered if you could ever lose eternal life. There have been times in my Christian life when I have doubted my salvation. Usually this has been when I have felt guilty about my mistakes and failures. Satan will always be working to make this life seem an unreliable, failing thing – just like our natural life. But look at these verses. Those born of God have a special power in their lives because they have a special life: God's life - **ETERNAL LIFE**. Look at what it says. ***“The wicked one does not touch him”*** (verse 18) because God **keeps** him. John could say, ***“we are OF GOD”***. (verse 19) The world belongs to Satan – the wicked one. I want to put it this way. God makes it His responsibility to guard, by His power, the eternal life that He has so freely given us. He will not let us down and we shall never lose it.

3. Something GREAT

“This is the TRUE GOD, (the REAL GOD) and eternal life”. (verse 20) It does seem as if, in these closing verses, John gathers all his greatest thoughts together. ***“WE KNOW that the Son of God has come – we may KNOW Him who is TRUE – we are IN Him who is true”***. (verse 20) Just look at all these certainties! I wonder just how long it had taken John to arrive at this unassailable position in his personal beliefs! I am sure that it was his continual experience of the presence of the Lord Jesus in his life, that made him so convinced. We can never really, fully measure, in this life, all that ETERNAL LIFE means. Remember that it is not only DURATION – lasting forever – but **QUALITY** – the very best and most real LIFE that we can ever enjoy. **John 10: 10** calls it ***“life more abundant.”*** The only way we can really prove how great this life is, is by allowing God to become absolutely FIRST in our lives. ***“Little children, keep (guard) yourselves from idols”***. (verse 21)

We saw that God WILL guard the life He has given us at all costs. He will never let us go. Now we must keep everything out of our lives that would spoil the display of the power and reality of eternal life.

Questions

Study 1

“Children of God”

1. Comment on the statement ‘It doesn't really matter what we believe as long as we are sincere about it’.
2. Give two things that would mark a person out as being a child of God.
3. What ‘great blessings’ do we receive through being in God's family?
4. What difference will ***“abiding in the Lord Jesus”*** make to our lives?
5. What commandment has God given us regarding all other members of His family?

Study 2

“We Know”

1. Name one of the ‘key-words’ of John's writings. Give three examples of this with their references.
2. Why is a ‘second-hand knowledge’ of God not sufficient for a truly happy Christian life?
3. a) What warning is John giving in the early verses of this chapter? (**also Chapter 2: 26**)
b) What is one sure test of a false testament?
4. Name two things that will result if the love of God is dwelling in us.
5. What, according to this chapter, is the greatest proof of God's love toward us?

Study 3

“This is the Victory”

1. Give three of John's reasons for writing this chapter.
2. What does Satan aim to do in the Christian's life?
3. WHY is it possible for us to live victorious Christian lives?
4. HOW is it possible for us to live victorious Christian lives?
5. Give two things that John says about ***“believing”*** in this letter?

Study 4

The Final Certainty

1. Why is it so important to be certain of the things that you believe?
2. What is the most important thing that John says about eternal life? Give references.
3. Why can't a person ever earn eternal life?
4. Why can a person never lose eternal life once he has gained it?
5. Give two practical lessons for Christian living that you have learnt from your studies in **1 John**.