

Important Themes (Topics) in 1 John



SABBATH—SEPTEMBER 5

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Matthew 5:13; John 14:6; Ephesians 4:25–5:21; 1 Timothy 3:15; 1 John.

MEMORY VERSE: “Dear friends, now we are children of God. He still hasn’t [has not] let us know what we will be. But we know that when Christ appears, we will be like him. We will see him as he really is” (1 John 3:2, NIV).

ON SEPTEMBER 11, 2001, there was a great tragedy caused by terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, D.C., U.S.A. Many people thought that evil had come to the world forever when the cold-blooded killing of thousands of people took place in broad daylight and was seen on our TV sets. To them the horror involved in such mass murder could never be equaled and could never be expected to be made right ever again. On September 11, these people saw the face of evil that went far beyond all culture,¹ traditions, and historical events as never before.

But, for John, what was evil and what was good was never in question. John knew that there was absolute (full) truth centered in Christ. This week we will review some of the major themes of 1 John. This includes His understanding of the nature of truth, which always forms the foundation of what is good.

A CLOSER LOOK AT THIS WEEK'S LESSON: What does John teach us about the work of the Godhead?² What symbols (word-pictures) does he use to teach the idea of what the church should be like? What is the only basis of our salvation?³ What does John teach about truth?

1. culture—the way people live, dress, think, eat, and get along with one another.

2. Godhead—the Father, His Son (Jesus), and the Holy Spirit make up the Godhead. Together they are one God.

3. salvation—God’s plan for saving sinners from eternal (without end) death; the gift of eternal life.

SUNDAY—SEPTEMBER 6**THE GODHEAD (1 John 2:16)**

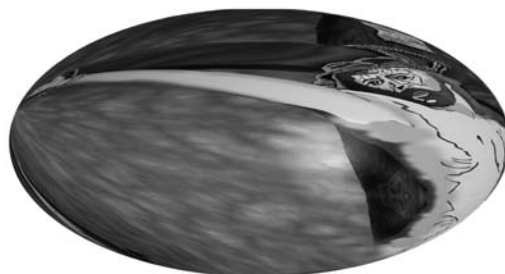
In 1 John, we are given an example of the Godhead, the Father (1 John 2:16), the Son (verse 23), and the Holy Spirit (1 John 5:6). The main focus is on Jesus and the Father. The letter tells us God is light and darkness (evil) is not found in Him. It tells us God is righteous (holy) and He is love. Our ability to love depends on God who is love. God's relationship to believers is shown by the word *children*, which itself shows the love and care God has for us. In short, 1 John paints for us a very positive and hopeful picture of what our God is like.

But the chapter also tells us something else. It tells us what the Lord is doing for us. Here is where our real hope and encouragement should lie.

What does 1 John say that God has done for us? And what is being done now for us, according to 1 John 1:9; 1 John 2:1, 2; 1 John 2:27; 1 John 3:8; 1 John 4:8–10; 1 John 5:11; and 1 John 5:14?

The letter tells of Christ's coming in the flesh, as well as His death for us. This offers us the opportunity (chance) to have eternal (forever; without end) life. At the same time, Jesus' death defeated the works of the devil, our enemy. According to 1 John, God forgives our sins, cleanses us, works for our good, and gives us eternal life. He offers us assurance

(hope) and makes us His children. The bottom line is it is the Cross and the blood of Jesus alone that save us, nothing else.



It is the Cross and blood of Jesus alone that save us.

Are there any areas of your life you have not fully surrendered (given) to the Lord? Are you doing things you know, deep down, are wrong but have not given up? If so, in the end only you can make the choice to give them up. If the Spirit is touching you, why not make the choice now? The longer you wait, the harder it gets.

MONDAY—SEPTEMBER 7**THE CHURCH (1 John 2:9–11)**

In the New Testament, the church is pictured through many symbols, such as salt (Matthew 5:13), a pillar (1 Timothy 3:15), a building or house (Ephesians 2:21, 22), a temple (1 Corinthians 3:16, 17), a mother (Revelation 12:1, 2), a bride (Revelation 21:2), and Christ's body (Ephesians 1:22, 23).



The church is pictured in the New Testament as salt and a house.

In 1 John, though the word *church* itself does not appear, the idea does. What symbol is found in 1 John 2:9–11; 1 John 2:13, 14; 1 John 2:12, 18; and 1 John 3:1 that better helps us understand what the church should be all about?



The church is also pictured as a mother and a bride.

In 1 John the church often is pictured as a family. There is the heavenly Father (12 times). In addition, John himself is a father figure, calling the church members “little children” (1 John 2:18

NKJV). The church members are children (13 times), fathers and young men (each twice in the NKJV), and brothers (13 times).

These words suggest a certain kind of closeness, showing a deep relationship and love for one another. They suggest the idea of belonging together. Everyone is needed, and everyone has a place in God’s family. In addition, this family includes the Godhead. As a result, this community (group) shows two sides (1) horizontal (people) and (2) vertical (God). As members of the church, we are part of the family of God.

How does 1 John 4:7 show the key to what it means to be part of God’s church?



In John’s letters the church is often pictured as a family.

How would you describe your relationship to the church family? Are you a backsliding child? Bossy father? Loving mother? Helpless baby? What changes do you need to make in order to be a more useful part of this special family?

TUESDAY—SEPTEMBER 8**SALVATION (1 John 4:9, 10)**

The Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, is all about Jesus. But it is not an empty story about Him. It is about Jesus and salvation. It is about what God has done for fallen sinners. It is about the wonderful way God gave Himself for us on the cross to bring us back to what we were before the Fall, and even more.

In short, the Bible is about salvation. And that is a key theme (idea) in 1 John too.

What do 1 John 1:9; 1 John 2:2; and 1 John 4:9, 10 tell us about how we are saved?

Our salvation is based on Christ's blood (1 John 1:7; 1 John 5:6, 8). In other words, it is His forgiving sacrifice (death on the cross) (1 John 2:2; 1 John 4:10). John does not talk about the Cross directly. But blood and forgiving sacrifice point to the Cross. It is not the example of Jesus that saves us. It is His death. But His example calls us to walk as He did (1 John 2:6).

For John, the salvation of the believers is very real. He describes it in different ways:

- They have come to know Him (1 John 2:2, 3).
- They are in Him (1 John 2:5; 1 John

5:20).

- Their sins have been forgiven (1 John 2:12).
- They have overcome Satan (verse 13).
- They have passed from death to life (1 John 3:14).
- They have eternal life (1 John 5:12, 13).

This is a wonderful picture of what salvation is all about.

We have great promises and hope in Jesus. So, what more could you do to reach more people with the good news? What sacrifices⁴ are you willing to make to give others the opportunity to know Jesus and His salvation?

WEDNESDAY—SEPTEMBER 9**CHRISTIAN BEHAVIOR⁵
(1 John 2:6)**

In his first letter, John deals with false teachings. He again and again deals with ethics.⁶ John clearly knows a study of God teaches us about ethics and false teachings can lead to wrong actions. So, it is important to be as correct in our study of religion as possible. For example, a wrong understanding of the law and grace⁷ has caused the failure of millions of people to keep God's Sabbath day holy. So, we must make sure our understanding

4. sacrifices—the things we give up, such as life or time or money, to save or help someone or something.

5. behavior—how people should act in certain situations.

6. ethics—a list of principles outlining what is right and wrong.

7. grace—God's free gift of forgiveness and mercy that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

of God and the Bible is mature, growing, and correct.

We also must make sure we practice what we believe. It is sad to see someone, a great preacher, run away with his neighbor's spouse (wife). It is sad for students studying religion to cheat on their exams. It also is sad that Sabbath keepers who know the truth about salvation, Jesus' work as our High Priest, and the state of the dead, still lie to one another.

Summarize what 1 John 1:7; 1 John 2:1, 15, 16; 1 John 3:4, 7, 15, 17, 18; 1 John 4:7; 1 John 5:2, 3 teach us about ethical behavior.

John focuses on ethical behavior with direct and indirect appeals (pleas). He calls for Christians not to lie, not to sin, not to hate brother or sister, not to love the world with its lusts and boastful pride, and not to practice lawlessness. Instead, John says we must be obedient, do what is right, and love one another in a positive way. Paul is more detailed than John (read, for example, Ephesians 4:25–5:21). But John has summarized all Paul says when he points to keeping God's commandments and walking as Jesus walked and lived (1 John 2:6).

John makes it clear that to be born of God, to know God, to love God, is something that will change our lives. For John, truth is not something for people to just believe. It is something for people to practice and live out. First John 3:7 says it very clearly:

“Dear children, don't [do not] let anyone lead you down the wrong path. Those who do what is right are holy, just as Christ is holy” (1JnV).

How are we to walk and live as Jesus lived? What does that mean to do this daily? Are you facing something right now that will require a lot of grace and strength to act as Christ would act?

THURSDAY—SEPTEMBER 10

TRUTH AND LIES (John 14:6)

From the period of the Greeks, who lived ages and ages ago, through even today, there has been the idea that truth depends on situations. There are no absolutes (sure laws). Humans (people) have to decide for themselves what is truth and what is error, what is good and what is bad, what is righteous (holy) and what is wrong. It is known as relativism.⁸ Relativism comes in different forms, but the basic point is the same: there is no absolute (perfect) standard of truth or goodness. In this view, we have to come up with these things ourselves—doing the best we can, according to our own culture, community, and traditions.

What is Jesus saying in John 14:6 about the nature of absolute (perfect) truth?

Clearly, Jesus does not accept the idea that truth is relative (flexible). In

8. relativism—standards vary, depending on situations, not on fixed laws or basic truths.

very clear words, Jesus shows us the absolute (perfect) truth, and we see it shown in Jesus as a Person!

What does John teach about truth in 1 John 2:4, 21; 1 John 3:19; 1 John 4:6; and 1 John 5:20?

John knows there are absolutes (perfect truths). John also makes it very clear there is a sharp difference between truth and lies. This difference becomes blurred in relativistic (flexible) worldviews. There is absolute (perfect) truth. God is true. Jesus and the Holy Spirit are truth. But a liar is a person who makes false claims, who confesses to love and does not keep the commandments, and who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Meanwhile, serious Christians know the truth, love the truth, and belong to the truth. So, truth is both what we understand and what we practice.

The Bible says we have absolute (perfect) truth. But is everything absolute (perfect and true)? Are there things that are not so firm and perfect but rather personal, cultural, and changeable? How can we learn to tell the difference between what must be absolute and unchanging and what can change and be relative (flexible), depending on situations?

FRIDAY—SEPTEMBER 11

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, “A Faithful Witness,”

pages 546–554, in *The Acts of the Apostles*.⁹

Today, 1 John is very much needed, because all kinds of false ideas are being pushed forward. John calls his readers, and us, not to believe everyone and not to accept new doctrines (beliefs) without testing them to make sure they follow the Bible. The ability to tell truth from error is needed.

John says true Christianity has these marks: (1) belief in Jesus as the Son of God, who has come as a human (person); (2) keeping of the commandments of God; and (3) love toward God and others. John wants to lay a solid foundation and help his readers have assurance (hope) of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ as the Bible teaches them.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

❶ Suppose the idea of moral relativism made some sense. Then it would be easy to believe that our happiness in life was purely the result of situations. If so, then where else should goodness come from other than from ourselves? And if we change our minds about what is righteous, well, so what? But what is truly wrong with that kind of thinking?

❷ Years ago someone asked British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan what the British government could do to help citizens be more righteous. He

⁹ apostles—the disciples (followers) of Jesus who preached and taught the gospel (the good news about Jesus) after Jesus rose from the dead and returned to heaven.

answered, “I’m [I am] only the prime minister. Go talk to the archbishop.” How could what we have studied this week help church members be more righteous? Or is it the purpose of the gospel¹⁰ to make us more righteous?

③ New York Mayor Fiorello Enrico La Guardia also was a judge during the hard years of the Depression in America. One day, a father was brought into his courtroom. The father had stolen bread. La Guardia asked him why he did it. Crying, the man said

it was to feed his hungry children. La Guardia told the man, “You have done a crime, you know that?” Being sorry, the man nodded and said, “Yes, sir.” La Guardia then said sternly “the law makes no exceptions.” The man said, “Yes.” La Guardia then put his hand into his pocket, took out \$10, and said, “Here’s [Here is] the payment for your fine. I pay it myself. You are guilty, but you will not pay the price of your guilt.” How does this story help us understand both the gospel and what it means to live like Jesus?

10. gospel—the good news that Jesus saves us from our sins; the good news about salvation.