

**Life BPC Sunday School Adults' Class:
Study of the First Epistle of John (Nov – Dec 2016)**

Introduction

Theme: The First Epistle of John is a practical letter addressed to Christian readers. It warns against the dangers of false teachings and exhorts believers to lives of obedience to God and love for the fellow believers. Its central theme is *fellowship* with God the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ (1:3). 'Know' as a verb was mentioned 34 times, indicating the need for Christians to be aware of, alert and astute in the knowledge of God.

Authorship: Though the name of the author did not appear in the letter, the epistle is traditionally ascribed by the Church Fathers to Apostle John. It is plain from the tone of the letter that the writer possessed spiritual authority. Moreover, he placed himself among the eyewitnesses to the Incarnate life of the Lord Jesus (1:1-2).

Place and Date: The letter contains no hint about the identity or location of the readers. Since the early church associates John with the Roman province of Asia (especially in Ephesus, modern-day Western Turkey), it is often thought that the readers lived there. There is a strong association with the Book of Revelation which was addressed to the Seven Churches of Asia (located in Western Turkey). It is believed to be written at some time before the Book of Revelation, when John was advanced in age (around AD 90).

Survey of John's Writings: The Spirit of God directed John the Apostle to pen five of the New Testament epistles. Apart from Paul, no other authors would write as much sacred Scripture in the New Testament as he did. They are:

	Gospel of John	Epistles of John	Revelation
Theme	The Cross	Fellowship	The Crown
Doctrinal focus	Deity of Christ (Salvation)	Humanity of Christ (Sanctification)	Supremacy of Christ (Glorification)
Time horizon	Past	Present	Future
Believers	Sheep in God's fold	Members in God's family	Priests in God's Kingdom

Table 1: Survey of John's Writings (Adapted: Willmington's Guide)

Book Outline (4Cs)

Focus	Basis of Fellowship		Behaviour of Fellowship	
Division	Conditions for Fellowship (1:1-2:14)	Cautions to Fellowship (2:15-2:29)	Characteristics of Fellowship (3:1-4:21)	Consequences of Fellowship (5:1-5:21)
Topics	Meaning of Fellowship		Manifestations of Fellowship	
	Abiding in God's Light		Abiding in God's Love	
Place	Ephesus			
Time	Around AD 90			

Table 2: Book Outline (4Cs) (Adapted: Talk Thru the Bible)

Teaching Schedule (by Dn Roger Lim)

Lesson 1: Conditions for Fellowship (1:1-2:14) (6 Nov)

Lesson 2: Cautions to Fellowship (2:15-2:29) (13 Nov)

Lesson 3: Characteristics of Fellowship (Part I) (3:1-24) (20 Nov)

Lesson 4: Characteristics of Fellowship (Part II) (4:1-21) (11 Dec)

Lesson 5: Consequences of Fellowship (5:1-21) (18 Dec)

(Note: Elder Ong to teach on 27 Nov & 4 Dec)

Lesson 1: Conditions for Fellowship (1John 1:1-2:14)

Overview

Chapter 1 starts with the Incarnation of the Word of Life (v.1-4), followed by a treatment on light and darkness, sin and forgiveness (v.5-10). This is part of the treatment on the 4 conditions for fellowship.

Incarnation of the Word of Life (1:1-4)

That which was from the beginning (v.1) – God’s Word has declared that Christ is the Word of Life, and He is at the time of Creation. This is a declaration of His Divinity, Eternity, Power and Sovereignty. This is a reminder of the earlier teaching in John 10:30 ‘I and my Father are one’, and ‘the Father is in me, and I in Him’ (John 10:38). These are augmented by the later teaching ‘I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty’ (Rev 1:8). This is speaking of Christ as the Almighty, in the past, present and future. This is also reinforced in v.2 ‘which was with the Father’.

As the Word of Life, Christ is the Word of God, the Word that gave them Life everlasting to those who believed. This ought to rouse and inflame all our powers with a desire for God.

That which we have heard, That which we have seen (v.1-2), – some have witnessed the life of Christ, ‘was manifested unto us’ (v.2), i.e., ‘seen, look, bear witness’ – 5 times in three verses! This is to show that John’s teachings about Christ is not new, they have seen Christ and aware of His life and teachings. They have examined, studied carefully before. They have interacted and they have experienced the power of gospel, with Changed lives! Changed lifestyle! Becoming changed persons! They must **not** forget their conversion experience. They must not forget their first love!

So what is the Purpose of the first 4 verses?_ To reinforce the gospel truths so that they maintain the Christian fellowship (v.3), and their joy may be full (v.4)! By believing the Word of Life, they can fellowship with God and the fellowship will help us to experience the joy of the Lord!

This point is aptly summed up in the song by Fanny Crosby:

Take the world but give me Jesus!
All its joys are but a name; (S1)
Take the world but give me Jesus!
Sweetest comfort of my soul;’ (S2)

Conditions for Fellowship (1:5-2:14)

1) Walk in the Light 1:5-7

Believers must know that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. Our fellowship with God (v.6) and with one another (v.7) is contingent on the fact that we are all walking in the light. This is the first condition for fellowship.

Application: Spiritual power comes when the congregation/fellowship is true to God, as learnt from the case of Achan (Josh chap 7) “there is an accursed thing in the midst of thee”. The sin of one believer will affect the effectiveness of the fellowship “Israel hath sinned” (Josh 7:11) although **only** one person and his family have sinned against God. It is the little foxes that spoil the vines (SS 2:15), we need to guard against seemingly harmless sins that may creep in unawares. Every sin is cunning, dangerous, seeking to entrap and to enslave us! Each one of us must walk in the light in order for the fellowship to be strong.

2) Confession of Sin 1:8-2:2

Another condition for fellowship is the spiritual state of believers. A sinning believer will not be effective for the Lord. We cannot have a proud and lying believer who is unrepentant (v.10 if we say we have not sinned). If we are in a state of sin, we must confess our sins to the Lord, who is our Advocate (plea on our behalf), the Righteous (without blame) and also the Propitiation (the sacrifice, whose love and sacrifice extended to the whole world).

Application: Story of Gehazi, the servant of Elisha (2Ki chap 5). We need to confess our sins (not because we will lose our salvation as in Roman Catholic’s teachings), because sins will stop us from enjoying God (like Adam and Eve, living in fear and guilt). Sins will also weaken our hands in Christian duty and love. We must be sensitive of our spiritual condition. We must listen to the “small still voice” (1Ki 19:12), we must repent and be true to God, and live a life that will glorify God and edify man. The second condition of fellowship is that every believer must not live in sin, but to confess and repent in they live in sin.

3) Obedience to God's Commandments 2:3-6

Another condition for Christian fellowship is obedience to God's Word. We know God (Truly, Personally, Experientially) if we keep His commandments (v.3). There is no clearer mandate that God's Word must be read and kept. Those who keep God's Word (v.5), therein is our love of God perfected (matured, full, complete). Otherwise, we are just a liar (v.4). If we abide in God, we will walk in the way commanded by God (v.6) – we reflect the glory of God. Read Jn 15:8.

Application: Obedience is the litmus test of our Christian faith. Like the way we test the functionalities of our gadgets and devices, whether do they respond to our wishes. Like the way we assess our pets whether do they obey our instructions. Like the way a commander will test a soldier whether will he obey the instructions without questioning. Obedience to God proves our loyalty and our faith. Read Exo 19: 5 'If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant...'. We must obey without questioning. Read Lk 6:46.

Obedience to God is the common theme in John's writings: 'if you love me, keep my commandments' (John 14:15), 'this is love, that we walk after His commandments' (2John 1:6). 'Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus' (Rev 14:12).

4) Love for One Another 2:7-14

Loving one another is not a new instruction (v.7). Those who hates his brother is walking in darkness (v.9). Those who walk in the light will love his brother (v.10). There is no ambiguity in this teaching. Our action towards others, our ability to love one another, our level of fellowship with fellow Christians is a reflection of our spiritual condition. Our inability to serve and love others is not due to external factors – the fault is not with others. The problem is internal. ***It is our spiritual state.*** We hate others because darkness has blinded us, because we are living in sin (v.11). Loving one another is the fourth condition for fellowship.

Application: As believers, we have overcome the world, we have overcome the wicked one (v.14). We are strong in the Lord. We must tap on the strength of the Lord to love others. We cannot live in sin but to repent and walk in the light. Story of Peter's love for the Sheep came from the love for Christ (John 21:15-17) – whether Peter first loved Him! Story of Judas (Luke 22:47-48). Story of Polycarp (disciple of John, one of the 3 Apostolic Fathers) – ability to love the Church and serve others came from his strong love in God. We must walk in the light in order to love others and serve the Church (v.10).

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