

Genuine Christianity

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Date: 06 February 2011

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[0 : 00] It would be a great help if you could have the Bible open in front of you at that page, page 989. We're looking at 1 John. And I'd also encourage you to grab a pen and feel free to take notes during the sermon if that's helpful for you.

I did think about having an outline, but then when you look at the size of the notice sheet that you have this week, it's bigger than a Sunday newspaper. There's lots in it. It's already quite full, so I'm kind of glad that you don't have an outline.

But if you feel like taking notes, then that's fine. It would be a good thing to pray and ask God for help to understand his word. And so why don't we stand together and I'll pray for us.

Father, thank you for speaking to us through your word of life, the gospel about Jesus. Thank you that true life comes from him. Thank you that true life is found in him.

Help us now to understand your word and believe it and be transformed by the renewing of our minds so that we might live lives that please and honor you and your son, Jesus.

[1 : 06] Amen. Please take a seat. Well, let's imagine something. Let's imagine that Holy Trinity Doncaster organizes a team of people to go to northern Queensland to help out victims of the recent disasters.

And let's imagine that Andrew and Heather Reid and their dogs are leading this trip. And let's say we all meet at Holy Trinity Car Park just out there and we're all convoy off together, single file, headed towards north Queensland, following Andrew and Heather all the way.

It's a road trip. And let's say after a few hours of travelling, we get to maybe Aubrey Wodonga. All of a sudden, Andrew and Heather take a sharp 90 degree angle right turn, head in a completely different direction down an unfamiliar, uncharted road, leaving the rest of us behind.

Well, let me ask you, what would your reaction be? Our leaders have departed. They've gone the wrong way. We're left behind. It's a hypothetical scenario, but how would you respond?

I imagine some of us might pull over and try calling them, but there's no answer on their phone. Some of us, I think, would stop, maybe get out our maps or our street directories, maybe check on the iPhone for where we are, where they have gone, try and get some sense of direction.

[2 : 28] Where are we headed? Trying to work all that out. Do we stay on course or do we not? I imagine that some of us would be tempted to break the convoy and follow Andrew and Heather, even if it's not the right direction.

Because after all, Andrew is the senior minister and nobody likes to be left behind. He's the leader. So he must know something more than we do. And it makes sense just to follow the leader. Forget the map.

Just follow the leader. Well, in this situation, what would you do? Whatever you would do. We can all agree, can't we, that it's a pretty horrible situation to be lost and to be frustrated, to feel isolated, to feel out of control, to be confused.

It's only a hypothetical situation, of course. But it paints a picture of what's going on in the background of this letter, 1 John. And over the next few weeks, we'll be going through this letter and we're going to see and hear John's response to a horrible situation.

Not that people are lost geographically, but rather lost theologically or spiritually. The situation is that some from within the church have broken away from the genuine, authentic Christian message and they're out teaching a counterfeit one.

[3 : 47] And there's a real danger that those who have stayed with the truth, with John and the apostles and their message, there's a danger that these ones will be tempted to or perhaps be persuaded to go after the false teachers and their teaching.

And John doesn't want that to happen. So, why is he writing? Well, I think two main concerns really push this letter and we'll see more of it in the coming weeks.

First thing is, I think, the first thing pushing this, I think, is a warning to genuine Christians not to follow the fakes. In chapter 2, he says antichrists are coming.

In fact, they have already come. Who are they? He says they went out from us, that is the church, but they did not belong to us. Because if they did belong to us, they would have remained with us.

And he says, I write to you concerning those who would deceive you. It's a warning. Like a parent teaching a small child about stranger danger. Stay away from them.

[4 : 50] Don't follow them. Don't be deceived. And the second reason, I think, is assurance. To remind genuine Christians they have genuine salvation in the genuine Jesus.

So, he says at the end of this letter, chapter 5, verse 13, I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you might know that you have eternal life.

Not just have it, but know you have it. In other words, he's reassuring them. Don't just have eternal life. Know you have it. Don't be sucked into any cheap, worthless, fake, counterfeit gospel.

You have eternal life, so know you have it. They don't. Those false teachers don't. But you do. So, stick with the truth. And so, those two concerns really drive what John is saying.

Warning against false teachers and assurance to stick with the truth. So, with that said, we need to first work out who this letter is from. Because you'll notice from the introduction that the letter doesn't specifically identify the author.

[6 : 00] Forget the title in the English Bible just for now that says John. There are many of the Apostle Paul's letters in the New Testament. And they all start with an identifiable greeting.

Something like, Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus or a servant of Christ Jesus to you, saints in Corinth or Rome or Ephesus or Philippi or wherever.

Paul clearly identifies himself and his audience. But what we'll see in this letter is that the author doesn't. It's not how he begins his letter.

And he doesn't specifically identify a particular congregation either that he's writing to. It could be a church or probably more likely a number of churches. And this is a general letter going out to a number of them.

We know the Gospel of John was written by the Apostle of Jesus called John. He was one of the twelve. One of Jesus' close inner three with Peter and James. So, the question is, is this letter by the same author of the Gospel of John?

[7 : 02] It bears the name in our Bibles, John. But who is it? Well, a couple of reasons to believe that the Apostle John, who wrote the Gospel, is the author of this letter.

Firstly, church history. The early church fathers taught and believed and identified the author of the letter, of this letter, with the Gospel of John as well. Which basically says to us that those who are closest in time to the writing believe that it was the Apostle John.

The second reason, as we see over the coming weeks, there's very similar, almost identical use of language, themes and ideas, both in this letter as well as the Gospel.

So, for example, we're going to hear and keep hearing words like truth, light, darkness, eternal life, son of God, believe, faith, love, hate.

It's all language that occurs and reoccurs in John's writings. And so, if it's the same author, then it makes sense that the language of both the Gospel and this letter will be similar, if not the same.

[8 : 14] But the third and most convincing reason to believe that this is written by the Apostle John is his own testimony about Jesus in the opening verses. So, let's look at what he says in chapter 1, verses 1 to 3.

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life.

This life was revealed. We have seen it and testified to it and declared to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us. We declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us.

And truly, our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. So, firstly, John is a messenger. Look at his language. We declare to you what was from the beginning.

And in verse 2, we testify and declare to you. In verse 3, we declare to you what we have seen and heard. There's this language of declaring, proclaiming, testifying.

[9 : 20] John very clearly is a messenger. John has a message and it's called in verse 2, sorry, the end of verse 1, the word of life. And put simply, John's message is that the invisible has become visible.

The eternal has entered our world. The creator has stepped down into his creation that God has become a man. You'll notice the language as well as we've heard it read, of almost the five senses.

He says, verse 1, what we have heard, seen with our eyes, looked at, touched with our hands. In verse 2, we have seen. And again in verse 3, we have seen and heard.

There's this continual language of looking and touching and hearing and seeing. He repeats it a number of times. He doesn't just say looked, heard and touched. That would be enough though because, I mean, if you see something, you see it with your eyes, don't you?

What else do you see it with? But he goes at labour to say, we saw with our eyes, we touched with our hands. Whose hands? These hands. My hands. My eyes.

[10 : 32] John testifies that the eternal God has come to our world in the flesh, in the man Jesus and John is a witness. Now compare that with the experience of Israel in Deuteronomy 4 which we heard earlier, that God had revealed himself to his people and to Moses primarily through words.

Yes, in some sense through deeds but primarily through words. God spoke to Moses through a burning bush. God says to Israel that in Deuteronomy 4 that they did not see his form or touch him.

They just have his words. John and the apostles on the other hand, they have seen and touched God's revelation of himself in Jesus Christ. God in the flesh.

Some of you may remember back in the 90s a very classic song by a one hit wonder called Joan Osborne. The song was called What If God Was One of Us? She asked in that song if God had a face what would it look like?

And she sings in the chorus quite repetitively. What if God was one of us? She jokes, just a slob like one of us. She says, What if God was one of us?

[11 : 45] Well, John's message answers that question. What if God did become one of us? John says, We have seen him. We have heard him.

We have touched him. God did become one of us in the man Jesus. John is very, very clear here. Jesus is God.

But why does John tell us this? Well, John is testifying that he is a genuine, authentic, true messenger of God because he's seen him and he's touched him.

Unlike the false teachers circulating their ideas and their speculations and revelations and teachings, John's message about God can be trusted because he has seen and touched and been with Jesus.

His message is true, it is genuine, it is authoritative. Therefore, to believe what John says about God is to have fellowship with God, which is what he says in verse 4.

[12 : 44] He writes, so that Christians then and us today will listen to him and by believing his message about Jesus will have relationship both with God the Father and with Jesus Christ.

He's a genuine messenger of God. That's verses 1-4. And this is his message, verse 5, That sentence really split up into two parts.

The first part is positive, God is light, and the second part in the negative, God is light and in him is no darkness at all. That's what light is.

That's what light does. If you turn a light on in a room, what does it do? It destroys the darkness. It excludes darkness. Light and dark are mutually exclusive. To say that God is light is to say that God has no evil in him.

Light is a moral quality. It describes God's character. God has nothing bad in him at all. God has never done anything bad or will do anything bad.

[13 : 58] He is totally and utterly good. God is always just. God is always perfect. God is always holy. God is always truthful. Or in other words, verse 5, God is light.

That's the message that John and the apostles proclaim. Let's just take a break there for a minute and go back to where we've come from. John is writing this letter in a situation where false teachers have gone out from the church and broken away from the church.

They're in the community. Not only have they rejected the message about Jesus, but they've rejected John and those who represent Jesus. and John begins by saying that not only has God come to earth in Jesus, but that John himself and the apostles are the appointed messengers.

They have seen him and touched him. They know him. Therefore, they have the truth about him. And he says, this is what we've heard from God and this is what he proclaims.

Verse 5, God is light and in him is no darkness. So now in verses 6 to 10, John points out the different ways people respond to the light.

[15 : 13] Probably with the claims of the false teachers in mind. In this section, he identifies three errors and then gives three correcting truths. He identifies each error, which begins with the phrase if we say or if we claim.

Then John explains the error, why it's wrong or what the underlying problem is and then he corrects it. We're going to see that in this section. Three errors or three claims in verses 6, 8 and 10.

So verse 5, the message is God is light and in him is no darkness. So how do people respond? The first error is in verse 6. If we say, so here's the claim, if we say we have fellowship with him, that is God, while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true.

So there's the claim, somebody who says, I have fellowship with God, but what do they do? They walk in darkness. The verb walk isn't talking about walking physically, the way you would say I've walked down the street to get a bottle of milk or something.

Walk is another way of talking about habitual daily practice, how a person lives, day to day, everyday life. Notice that light and dark are contrasted here.

[16 : 37] God is light and in him is no darkness. God is, in other words, holy and just and good. So darkness is unholy, unjust, ungodliness, or what the Bible calls sin.

Therefore, to walk in darkness is John's way of saying living in persistent, habitual, unrepentant sin. That's what it means to walk or live in darkness, to live a life oriented around, driven by, characterized by habitual, unrepentant sin, which is totally opposed to God.

And John says if we, it's an inclusive we, so it's not just John and the apostles, but if anyone, if anyone claims to have fellowship with the God who is light while walking in darkness, that person's a liar.

That person might claim to have fellowship with God, that person might sincerely think they have relationship with God, but John says you don't. You're a liar.

You do not do what is true. Notice he says you do not do what is true, not do not know what is true, which is what you would expect the sentence to say. He says do not do what is true.

[17 : 51] He says that because there is a direct link between belief and behavior. In the Bible, right doctrine or theology is always linked with right behavior because it results in right behavior.

It produces right behavior. In the Bible, what you believe comes out in practice. Belief and behavior are linked. Truth and godliness and the opposites are also linked as well.

Error or unbelief and ungodliness. They go hand in hand. They always go together. Belief and behavior. which is why John says if you claim a relationship with God who is light while continuing to walk in darkness or habitual, unrepentant, persistent sin as your daily habit and way of life, he says you're a liar and you do not do what is true.

Your actions prove you don't know the truth because you do not do what is true. And in effect, you're saying to God sin doesn't matter when clearly sin does matter to God.

So there's the first error. Claiming a relationship with God all the while living in complete moral opposition to him. But you might be asking the question, but does that mean the Christian life is lived out sinlessly perfect?

[19 : 13] Well, the answer is no because look on in verse 7. He corrects the first error. Notice in verse 7 the word but. Here's the contrast with verse 6.

So don't walk in darkness. But if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, well, the result is we have fellowship with one another and the blood of his son Jesus cleanses us from all sin.

Now, the blood of Jesus is a way of talking about the death of Jesus, Jesus' death on the cross for our sins in our place where God's son Jesus bore the punishment our sins deserve.

And the cleansing mentioned here describes an ongoing action. It means to continually be cleansed. Jesus' death is for our past sins but also our present and future.

The forgiveness of sins isn't a one-time only event as though it was the way into the Christian life and then once you become a Christian you go on to something else. Not at all.

- [20 : 13] It's the way in and through the Christian life. Jesus' death provides ongoing cleansing for sin. So walking in the light isn't about living a sinlessly perfect life.

It's about living rightly before God by trusting Jesus' death for the forgiveness of sin and what should result and what will result is a life change, a change in direction instead of being against God and opposed to Him but instead living rightly before Him.

The next error is in verse 8. If we say we have no sin that is no sinful nature that deep down in our hearts we're not evil what's the problem?

Well, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If the first error basically tells a lie this error tells a lie to the person telling it.

It's a self-delusion. To claim that we have no sin is a rejection of God's Word which clearly teaches that we're sinful. In Psalm 51 we're told that we're sinful from birth.

- [21 : 28] You don't have to teach a three-year-old to be selfish. They just are because we're sinful from birth. So it's a lie and a self-delusion to believe we're not sinful.

Instead, what's the right response? Look at verse 9. If we confess our sins he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

So there's that language of cleansing again referring back to Jesus' death that provides our forgiveness and cleansing from sin. Instead of denying the problem of sin the solution is to openly admit it before God that it's true.

And God is both faithful to forgive because he promises to forgive on the basis of Jesus' death and he's also just to forgive because our sins are placed on Jesus and Jesus takes the punishment away from us.

God is able to justly forgive us not by sweeping our sins under the rug as though they don't matter. That's not justice at all. But he places our sins on Jesus and Jesus takes the punishment and the justice and so God is both able to be faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

- [22 : 49] And the third error is if we say we have not sinned. It's in verse 10. If we say we have not sinned that is some might agree that we're okay we're sinful but we just don't do bad things anymore.

Not since becoming a Christian or not since I read that book or I don't sin anymore I've got it under control. John says you call God a liar which is actually a sin which proves John's point.

God repeatedly says through his word places like Isaiah all of us have become unclean. God says through Paul in Romans that there is no one righteous not even one.

All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. To claim we have not sinned is to call God a liar. And he corrects this error and it goes on in verse 2 so we'll just look at it a little bit verses sorry chapter 2 verses 1 and 2 if anyone does sin we have an advocate with the father Jesus Christ the righteous he's the atoning sacrifice for our sins not only ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

The solution to this error is that Jesus Christ is the atoning sacrifice for our sins. His death takes away our sin and it removes God's anger from us which is what an atoning sacrifice does.

- [24 : 12] It's a sacrifice that turns away anger God's anger in this case. So there are three errors in verses 6 to 10. Firstly that sin doesn't matter.

Secondly the claim that I'm not sinful and the third that I don't sin. John says in each of those cases you're telling a lie you're lying to yourself or you're calling God a liar.

So they're all wrong and that's John's point. If you like John provides tests for who's genuine and who's fake. Genuine Christians know the truth and they live appropriately and rightly in response to it.

Believing the truth about Jesus changes the way they live in obedience to him. False teachers on the other hand you can see their errors not just in what they say but in how they live.

And as we go through 1 John over the next few weeks we're going to see John's tests. Tests of genuine Christianity and tests of counterfeit Christianity. And his tests really are about three things.

[25 : 19] Doctrine particularly who Jesus is. The second test is about morality and whether or not a person lives in obedience to God. And the third test is a relational test.

How do they treat other Christians? So we're going to see those tests. And the point of the test is not here's a list of things you need to do in order to become a Christian.

Living a godly life and so on. But these are the tests that prove who is a Christian and who isn't. Because false teachers claim they are but John says that they're not.

So John writes the way that he does and we have these tests we've seen two of them tonight about teaching about Jesus as well as morality and how to live in response to that.

And we'll see John bring these ideas up again as we go through the rest of the letter. John writes the way he does because if you're not a Christian then you won't pass these tests.

[26 : 20] And if you are a Christian you will. If you're a Christian these tests are your world if you like. This is where you live. The forgiveness of sins and the reality of who Jesus is and living rightly before God.

This is a walk in a park for you. So that's one John. verses 1 to 10 from chapter 1. It's from genuine messengers about the real and genuine authentic Jesus and it identifies genuine Christians.

Those who trust Jesus for the forgiveness of sins and who live rightly and obediently to God in response to him. But we're not living in the first century so what's it got to do with us?

Well in every age from the first century that John is writing in to our situation today there are counterfeit Christianities on the market. Some promote themselves door to door and you've seen them probably down the streets riding their bikes in their suits door knocking trying to persuade people to leave the real gospel for their new teaching or new revelation or their particular spiritual leader or whatever.

some unfortunately do rise up from within mainstream Christian churches some even lead churches and denominations and groups and the great temptation for John's audience and even for us today is to follow the counterfeit instead of the genuine and one John is deadly serious.

[27 : 53] So the message is don't get sucked in by false teaching whatever it is whether it's from a conference or a DVD teaching series or a church pulpit or a Bible study or YouTube video whatever it is don't be sucked in by the fakes.

If you're a Christian that is you believe Jesus is God in the flesh you believe what John and the New Testament says about Jesus about his death on the cross for sin and his bodily resurrection if you believe that God hates sin if you believe that there are implications for how you live in the world in response to God because of who he is then you know the truth.

So don't be sucked in by a counterfeit fake worthless gospel. Stick with the truth. Stick with John. God is light and in him is no darkness.

If we say we have fellowship with him while walking in darkness then we lie and we do not do what is true. But if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus his son cleanses us from all sin.

If anyone does sin we have an advocate with the father Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

[29 : 14] Let's pray. Father thank you for being so good to us and kind in Jesus. Thank you for revealing yourself.

Thank you for sending your son into our world. Thank you that he died for our sins and rose again. Thank you that he lives and thank you that he is at your right hand as our advocate.

Thank you that he is Jesus Christ the righteous. Father please protect us from false teaching in our own day. Help us to recognize it with what John tells us in your word.

Please help us to live in the light and not in darkness because you are light and there is no darkness in you at all. Father thank you for giving us your word. Please help us respond rightly and obediently.

Please help us to regularly confess our sins to you. Thank you that Jesus blood provides ongoing cleansing for the forgiveness of our sins. Father thank you again for being who you are and for speaking to us and we pray that we would live differently because of who you are.

[30 : 21] And we pray to you in Jesus name. Amen.