



LIFE, LIGHT, AND LOVE: A STUDY OF THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

WEEK ONE - GOD IS LIFE

Background: John was an old man, living in Ephesus, when he wrote these three epistles. He may well have been the only living disciple of those who had originally been called by Jesus. John is often referred to as “*the beloved disciple*” because he was close to Jesus. He is in many ways the antithesis of Peter, who was bold and brash, tending to jump in with both feet. John seems a calmer and more loving character. However, what this shows us is that God needs all kinds of people to make up his church; we must learn to live and work together for the building of God’s kingdom.

If you read John’s gospel, you will see a similarity of style to the epistles. As in his gospel, here John speaks much about the love of God. It is worth reading chapters 1 and 14-17 of John’s gospel to see what he says there about God’s love for his son Jesus, and his love for us.

The other factor we need to be aware of is that some Christians were unsettled by new ideas and false doctrines. The heresy that concerned John was what became known as ‘Gnosticism’. Essentially it stated that matter is evil, and spirit is good. It denied the incarnation of Christ and therefore, the resurrection. If matter of which we are made is evil, then there is no way that Jesus, part of the Godhead, could have inhabited a body of flesh and blood. They taught: *the body is bad, but the spirit is good. True life is in the spirit. What we do in the body does not affect the spirit. So, it does not matter how we live in the body.*

John, therefore, first set out to show how false this teaching was, and then to build up and confirm the true faith of the believers.

It is important for us to realise how easily people can be persuaded by wrong teachings. If what is being taught doesn’t line up with what the Bible says, then we should leave it well alone.

Read John’s Gospel chapter 1 and the first chapter of 1 John.

- Notice in the first verse of the Epistle, John says: *We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is Jesus Christ, the Word of life.* What is John saying that disproves the Gnostic teachings?

- What similarities are there between these two chapters? Write them down so you can get a clear picture of John's teaching.

Many people ask: *What is the meaning of life? What is the purpose of it all?* As Christians we must be able to give them an answer.

1 Peter 3:15, NIV: *"But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,"*

- Are you able to explain to people why you believe in God and in his son, Jesus?
- If you would find that difficult, try writing out an explanation for yourself, using relevant scriptures, and make sure you have it clear in your mind. After all, someone shared the good news of the Gospel with you and telling others is how you repay that person's faithfulness.

This life down here is not all there is for us to experience. In **Ecclesiastes 3:11** Solomon says of God: *"He has also set eternity in the hearts of men."* If we are honest, we instinctively know there is more than life on earth. Throughout history, all civilisations and cultures have looked to 'gods' of one kind or another, to give their lives meaning and direction. Sadly, they have looked to gods made of wood, stone, or metal.

Psalm 115:3-8: *Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him. But their idols are silver and gold, made by human hands. They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but cannot see. They have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but cannot smell. They have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but cannot walk, nor can they utter a sound with their throats. Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them.*

In **Genesis 1:26**, we read that God created mankind in His image and he had fellowship in the garden with them. However, later, because of Adam and Eve's disobedience mankind was under the curse of sin and had to leave God's physical presence.

Revelation 20 and 21, tells us at the end of time, God will create a new heaven and a new earth and that fellowship with him will be restored.

However, between the beginning and the end of scripture, something wonderful happened.

***God sent His son, they called Him Jesus; He came to love, heal, and forgive;
He lived and died to buy my pardon, an empty grave is there to prove my Saviour
lives!***

Chorus

***Because He lives, I can face tomorrow, Because He lives, all fear is gone;
Because I know He holds the future, and life is worth the living,
Just because He lives! (Bill Gaither)***

In John 10:10, Jesus said: I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.

THIS IS THE LIFE that John talks about in **1 John:1-4**. Life is more than mere existence. The song tells us of all that we can have because Jesus was born, died and rose again for us.

Jesus came to restore true life for us whilst on earth, and in eternity. **In Matthew 16:24-25** Jesus says: *“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever loses his life for me will find it.”*

- What difference has Jesus made in your life?
- Do we understand that God is the source of all life and being?
- Becoming a Christian doesn't guarantee an easy life; far from it. But Jesus promises us life eternal if we are prepared to take up the cross and follow him.

John brought a clear message to refute the teachings of Gnosticism. It is important to understand that the way we live not only impacts on us but also on other people. Jesus took on humanity and Paul lays it out clearly in **Philippians 2:3-11**, *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross! Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Prayer: I thank you Father, that you are the source of life and we can put our hope and trust in you and in your son Jesus, who gave up everything that we might have life on earth and in heaven.

