

1 John 1:1-2:6: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] 1 John 1.1-2.6 And indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him is no darkness at all.

If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar and his word is not in us. My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

[1 : 31] He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.

Whoever says, I know him, but does not keep his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected.

By this we may know that we are in him. Whoever says he abides in him, ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. The book of 1 John lacks certain of the features that we might usually associate with an epistle.

Some scholars have suggested that it might have been an encyclical. However, it does seem to be directed to a specific situation and to its issues. It was most likely written by John, the brother of James, and the author of the Gospel and of Revelation.

This has been disputed by many, but when we look at the resemblances between the works, the traditional identification of the author would seem to be supported. When reading such a work, as we do not have intact writings of the people to whom John is responding, we have to engage in a sort of shadow reading.

[2 : 37] We must try to deduce the arguments of John's opponents, inferring their position from John's arguments against them. Many scholars have argued that what we have here is an argument against a sort of proto-Gnosticism.

The opponents of John are arguing that Christ did not come in the flesh, and denying that Jesus was the Son of God. They also seem to be arising from within the Church itself. It is very difficult to define Gnosticism, which was a very broad and variegated movement.

Most represent it as a sort of dualism, dividing spirit, which is good and divine, and matter, which is created and evil. This obviously creates problems for the claim that Jesus came in the flesh.

A man named Corinthus, in the second half of the first century, is often seen as a key exponent, representative of the sort of position that John might have been responding to. I. Howard Marshall quotes Irenaeus, the early church father, on Corinthus.

A certain Corinthus in Asia taught that the world was not made by the first God, but by a power which was widely separated and remote from that supreme power which is above the all, and did not know the God who was over all things.

[3 : 43] Jesus, he suggested, was not born of a virgin, for that seemed to him impossible, but was the son of Joseph and Mary, just like all the rest of men, but far beyond them in justice and prudence and wisdom.

After his baptism Christ descended upon him in the form of a dove, from the power that is over all things, and then he proclaimed the unknown Father and accomplished miracles. But at the end, Christ separated again from Jesus, and Jesus suffered and was raised again, but Christ remained impassable, since he was pneumatic.

In his commentary on the book, Peter Lighthouse pays a special attention to chapter 2 verse 22, and its description of Antichrist. For Lighthouse, the suggestion that the opponents were denying that Jesus is the Christ, or the Messiah, is a key piece of information.

It suggests that they were operating within a primarily Jewish framework, and we see in the early church a mix between Gnostic and Jewish positions at a number of points. 1 John chapter 1 does not begin as a typical epistle might, with the sender and with greetings.

It seems more like a written sermon or address. However, it does seem to be directed at an audience that is known to the writer. It begins with the incarnation. Christ, the word of life, was from the beginning, and they experienced him first hand with their senses.

[5 : 10] They heard him, they saw him, they looked upon him, they touched him with their hands. The word of life is both the message and the person. By opening the epistle with a reference to the one who was from the beginning, John might recall the beginning of his gospel.

In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

As eyewitnesses of this life, they testify concerning it. The life was with the Father, and made manifest to the eyewitnesses of Christ. Christ is the ultimate source of life.

In John chapter 5 verse 26, For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. In chapter 14 verse 6 of the Gospel of John, Jesus said to him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me. The eyewitnesses, in their turn, pass on what they heard and saw and touched, proclaiming it to others in their words. Christ is not just an individual, but the bearer of a life that is shared with his people in fellowship, with the gift of the Spirit.

[6 : 21] John speaks of the communion, that they enjoy with the Father and with the Son. They proclaim what they have seen, and what they have heard, so that others would share fellowship with them, that they too would know participation in the life of Christ, and in that fulfill and share in the joy of the apostles themselves.

In verse 5, he moves from life and fellowship to light. The message received from Christ is that God is light, and without darkness. The light-darkness contrast recalls creation.

The creation of light is the first act of the original creation. Creation moves from darkness to light. This is a common theme in the New Testament, in 2 Corinthians chapter 4 verse 6.

For God, who said, Let light shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Ephesians chapter 5 verses 8 to 14.

For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light, for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true. And try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.

[7 : 26] Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them, for it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light.

Therefore it says, Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you. In Christ, the light of the long-awaited day of the Lord has dawned. God dwells in inapproachable light, without any darkness at all.

And as the light of Christ dawns, we are called to step into the light, to become people of the light and the day that has come upon us. Fellowship with the God who is light requires that we walk in that light.

This is not merely the sight of fellowship with God, but of fellowship with each other as well. Darkness separates us from God, and it separates us from each other. In the darkness of sin, we shrink back from the exposure of the light, we hide ourselves from others, and we hide ourselves also from God.

As we walk into the light, we can give ourselves both to God and to our neighbours. Mere verbal affirmation of Christ is not enough. To know fellowship with the one who is light and life, we must walk in the light.

[8 : 40] Our walking in the light is proof of fellowship. The light is scary because it exposes things, most particularly our sins. However, the blood of Jesus can cleanse us from all sin.

Denying that we have sin is not only self-deception, but presenting God himself to be a liar. The blood of Christ is for those who walk in the light. Those who refuse to expose their sins to the light cannot truly be forgiven them.

You can only know forgiveness for what you have confessed. Receiving the forgiveness that God offers requires that we acknowledge our sin. And that first step into the light, confessing our sins, exposing them to the truth of God, is the most scary step of all.

Walking in the light necessitates a transformed manner of relating to sin. The darkness is a realm of hiding from the light that exposes sin. It is also sin's home turf and its breeding ground.

As guilt makes us shrink back from the light, we find that sin will grow, it will spread, and it will develop. Shrinking back from the light that exposes sins for forgiveness condemns us to walk in a realm where sin holds sway.

[9 : 48] John wishes his readers to avoid sin, that way of life that belongs to the darkness. However, as fallen people, we will sin. Fallen human beings cannot live sinless lives.

When that happens, John wants us to be assured that we have both an advocate and a sacrifice for our sins. It is confidence in this that enables us to step out into the exposure of the light.

Jesus speaks on our behalf before the Father. He's an advocate for us. He also deals with our sins as an atoning sacrifice. These are very prominent themes in the book of Hebrews, for instance.

Jesus' death covers our sins, like the covering of the ark from which the word is taken. Perhaps we could think of this as a sort of heat shield that enables us to approach the consuming, fiery holiness of God without being burnt up.

In this capacity, Jesus covers the whole creation. He saves all of humanity from destruction. The world is still here because Jesus died, and his death covers the earth, preserving it from God's judgment.

[10 : 50] However, while Christ's sacrifice saves all in this sense, and he is the saviour and the Lord of all, he is the saviour of those who believe in a special sense. The judgment of the wicked has been delayed by the death of Christ, but they will be destroyed.

However, the righteous will finally be redeemed. John moves on to the question of how we know that we know Christ. The answer is by keeping his commandments. Reading this, we might be tempted to think that we know that we know Christ by knowing that we keep his commandments.

We look at the works that we have done and we measure them up relative to God's law, and if they seem to be pretty good relative to God's law, we know that we're in the right with God. But experience would teach that that doesn't give much comfort much to the time.

When we do compare our works to God's law, we find that they fall so far short. Perhaps the knowledge is not an abstract knowledge, nor is the assurance found in knowing something about our works, but in the practice of our works.

How do you know that you have come into a loving relationship with your spouse, for instance? Do you stand back and look at all the works that you have done and measure them up next to the standard of the perfect husband or wife?

[11 : 59] No. The best way to know that you are in a loving relationship with your spouse is by actually living in fellowship with them. As you live in a way that honours and seeks to please your spouse, you will almost certainly find that that is where the love of your spouse is most clearly known and where the strongest assurance of the truth of your relationship is to be discovered.

It is the same with our relationship with God. If you want to be assured of your relationship with God, seek his face, ask his forgiveness, obey his commandments, live in his presence, seek his good pleasure.

As you abide in the love of God in such a way, you will be able to enjoy a much greater assurance of the fact that you have come to know him. On the other hand, how do you know that someone has not come to a knowledge of God?

Look at the fruits that they produce. Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

On that day, many will say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name and do many mighty works in your name? And then will I declare to them, I never knew you.

[13 : 07] Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. The person who has truly come to know Christ will live in a manner that manifests that truth. He will keep the word of Christ and in him, the love of God will be perfected.

If then we say that we abide in Christ, we must live our lives in fellowship with him and in a way that follows the pattern of his own life. Considering 1 John and other passages in the New Testament, how can we further fill out the picture of what it means to live in the light?