



# Finer Grounds Bible Study

## 1, 2, & 3 John

### Lesson 1: 1 John 1:1-4

#### Introduction

I remember the first time I studied through the book of 1 John. It was in my early teens—during a time of anxiety, change, and doubt—a time where I was lacking in confidence and discovering my identity. I still remember the feeling those words gave me—how I was overcome with emotion, hearing them explained for the first time: “And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments...” Tears welled up in my eyes. I can know that I am in Him. I can know I am safe. I can have confidence. As we worked through the book, verse after verse, God built up my confidence in how His unending love works with His infallible truth.

That’s probably why 1 John is my favorite book—studying it has always given me a greater confidence in my salvation and a deeper appreciation of my God. It is a book that is, from beginning to end, about how to be sure about your walk with Christ. In more closely examining this book, you will find that you have a truer sense of your identity—and begin to believe that you really can be victorious.

But let’s not get the idea that this book is all about us. While it is true that we will learn more about ourselves and our place as we read and reflect, the truth is that this book is all about Christ, the Word of Life. From the very beginning [“That which was from the beginning... the Word of Life” (1:1)] to the very end [“we may know him

who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life” (5:20)] we are encouraged to know Him.

And that is exactly as it should be—because it is only in knowing the Savior that we can truly learn who we are and who we are meant to be. It is only in Him that we have any true confidence at all—and only in Him that we find our true value. In knowing Him better, we know ourselves better so that we can change our walk of life so that we can have a greater confidence in where we stand.

Who He is never changes—it is we who must change in light of His perfection.

#### Authorship

The author of 1, 2, and 3 John is the same man as wrote the gospel of John: John, the apostle. Being written by the same author, these books are very similar in style to the gospel of John and contain some of the same language and concepts. We will consider parallels several times during our study. It is interesting to note the dynamic nature of this man’s character. He went from being nicknamed a “son of Thunder” (Mark 3:17)—the kind of man who wanted to hastily call down fire on the disobedient (Luke 9:54)—to being an elder (one who could not be quarrelsome or hasty; 1 Timothy 3:2-3), and the author of a lovingly-written set of epistles. He calls his audience his “little children” and speaks of love. His thunderous, hasty personality has been tamed



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by the love of God, and He wants his readers to access that love and light too.

But it is also important to note that his thunder is still there—he has no tolerance for those who would spread falsehood and holds the strongest of language for those who would twist the scriptures. This picture of John is an important one—it shows us that 1) we can change and 2) if we submit our personalities to God, He can make what seems the worst of us into our best attributes. John allowed God to curb his anger into usefulness.

### John's purpose in writing:

1. That they may have fellowship with their brethren, the Father, and the Son (1:3)
2. That they might have joy (1:4)
3. That they do not sin (2:1)
4. That they be aware of false teachers (2:26)
5. That they believe on the name of the Son of God (5:13)
6. That they may know they have eternal life (5:13)

### Audience

The audience John was writing to was confused about who Christ was, how He acted, and what His sacrifice now meant to their lives. There were false teachers deceiving them as to the identity of Christ (1 John 2:22; 4:3) and their identity in Christ (1 John 3:7). These false teachers were called “Gnostics” (from the Greek, “to know”)—a people that prided themselves in having a “higher knowledge” and who believed that it was impossible for Jesus to be both God and human—hence the need to defend both Jesus’ humanity and deity.

Unlike many other epistles, this book’s focus isn’t so much on Christians perseverance against persecution— though there is a commandment to “love not the world” (1 John 2:15), the pull from the world seems to be more it’s temptations rather than its hostility. This book is more about their dealing with internal struggles in the church: rejecting false teachers, loving their brethren, learning the true nature of God and Christ, and being sure and confident in their own salvation.

### Repeated words:

- love (23)
- know (22)
- brother (10)
- truth (9)
- lie/liar (8)
- light (5)
- confidence/boldness (4)

### Repeated phrases:

- we/you know (18)
- little children (9)
- born of God (5)
- love of God (6)

My book summary statement: “How to know Christ, be more like Him, and understand your identity as a child of God, born-again in Him.”

**How do you think people are trying to confuse us about the identity of Christ and our identity in Him today?**

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John says over and over again in this book that they can be confident and know the truth.

- Why do you think John emphasized this point?

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- What does it mean to you to know that you can know the truth?

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- Can you think of anyone today telling us that we can't be sure of what God says?

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A common theme in the book of John is one of having confidence in salvation.

- Have you ever felt like you couldn't know if you were saved or not? If yes, what made you feel that way?

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- John seemed to think it was important that the Christians understood that they could have confidence. What kind of attitudes and behaviours change in us when we begin to walk in confidence?

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Are you willing to let these books shape your view of Christ, truth, and (as a consequence) yourself?

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## Read 1 John 1:1-4

The first thing we notice about this epistle is that there is no author's introduction. Instead, the author launches into an introduction of the person his audience were truly confused about: Jesus. While Paul often had to defend his authority and apostleship, John finds himself having to defend Jesus Christ. John must attest to Jesus' humanity and deity because there were false teachers (antichrists; cf. 1 John 2:18-22; 4:3) that were claiming Jesus was merely a spirit and didn't come in the flesh at all.

- "that which was from the beginning": Jesus predates the world and time—He was there with God in the beginning, because He is God (also see John 1:1-2; 17:5).
- "...which we have heard... seen... looked upon... handled": John speaks from firsthand experience. He walked with Jesus when He was here on this earth—and he wants his audience to understand how very real and human Jesus was while He was on earth (see also Luke 24:39; John 20:27-29).



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John is able to write from the perspective of actually seeing Jesus firsthand

- Can you imagine how difficult it would be for John to hear of people denying Jesus ever took on full humanity?

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- What is the reason speaking about Jesus was so important to John—and the reason it should matter to us today? Compare 1 John 5:13 & John 20:31

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Consider the fact that Christ became man:

- Look at Philippians 2:5-11—Jesus gave up being equal with God to become man and learn obedience
- Look at Hebrews 4:14, 15—Jesus is now our perfectly sympathetic High Priest because He experience humanity
- How is the reminder that Christ came in the likeness of man still important for us to remember today?

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- Are there still groups of people confused about the deity and humanity of Jesus today?

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Read 1 John 1:1-4 again, noticing the different names and attributes of Christ

In these verses John shows a few different sides of the identity of Christ. Christ is called:

- That Which was from the Beginning-- (v.1; see also John 1:1)
- The Word (v.1; see also John 1:1, 14).
  - “Jesus is called the Word because He is the ultimate communication of God to man”
  - There was literally no better way that God could show Himself to us than through Jesus (John 14:8-10)
- Life/eternal life (v.2; see also John 1:4; 10:10; 14:6; 12:48)
- Son of God (v.3; see also John 1:14, 18, 34; 20:31)
- Completely human (“...which we have heard... seen... looked upon... handled)

What does each of these names tell us about Jesus?

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How does learning about Jesus help us to understand God better?

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**Consider the fact that the more you become like Christ, the better you communicate God to man. What responsibility does this give you, as one who is trying to be like Christ?**

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## Read 1 John 1:3

John here gives one of the reasons why it is so important that they know Christ correctly—they must know who He is so that 1) we can have fellowship with God and 2) we can have fellowship with brothers and sisters in Christ. Fellowship (KOINONIA, Strong’s) means “partnership” or “communication” and implies a relationship. This means that unless we know and accept who Christ is—both His deity and His humanity—we cannot have relationship with Him or His followers. Christ lived and died as a man—and His message rings on so that we can enjoy communication and relationship with Him and the Father and enjoy fellowship with our brothers and sisters as a part of His body.

## Read 1 John 1:4

Here John states that he is writing them this letter to bring about joy—and that joy can be fully known. Some manuscripts say “your joy” while others say “our joy”—either way, there is a lesson for us that is in harmony with the rest of the Biblical text. If it is “your joy”: while, we don’t often associate learning and responsibility with joy, but there is joy in learning and knowing Christ better. If it is “our joy”: John states in 1 & 2 John that he finds great joy in God’s children practicing the truth (2 John 1:4; 3 John 1:4). Either way, when truth is taught and practiced,

there is joy. The teaching may seem difficult but, ultimately, rejoicing will be the result. Everything that God has commanded, He has said because He loves us (1 John 5:3). John understood that and loved the church so much that he made it his goal to bring them as closely to God’s love as he could be teaching them the truth.

**What does it mean to you to know that knowing more about Jesus and truth helps you to have a greater fellowship with God?**

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**What should you do in light of this knowledge?**

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**As you go through this book, consider how all the things John is saying are designed to bring joy—both the truths and the commandments.**

- **How is there joy in learning about the humanity, deity, and sacrifice of Jesus?**

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- **How is there joy in learning about our responsibilities to Christ and the Father?**

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