

THE  
LETTERS OF

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JOHN

WILLIAM MACDONALD



*Developed as a study course by Emmaus Correspondence School, founded in 1942.*

*The Letters of John*

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# STUDENT INSTRUCTIONS

The Letters of John are practical. They can be disturbing, too, for John allows no shades of gray in our lives. With him things are either black or white, right or wrong, true or false, good or bad. “God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.”

Thus these letters are especially relevant to our day and age. We are living in days when, so far as the world is concerned, the prevailing philosophy is that morals are relative and religion should be synthesized. John’s writings blow such fuzzy cobwebs right out of the minds of God’s people.

This study will challenge you to face squarely the absolutes of the Christian faith.

## Lessons You Will Study

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## **Course Components**

This course has two parts: this study course and the exam booklet.

## **How To Study**

This study has six chapters, and each chapter has its own exam. Begin by asking God to help you understand the material. Read the chapter through at least twice, once to get a general idea of its contents and then again, slowly, looking up any Bible references given.

Begin studying immediately, or if you are in a group, as soon as the group begins. We suggest that you keep a regular schedule by trying to complete at least one chapter per week.

## **Exams**

In the exam booklet there is one exam for each chapter (exam 1 covers chapter 1 of the course). Do not answer the questions by what you think or have always believed. The questions are designed to find out if you understand the material given in the course.

After you have completed each chapter, review the related exam and see how well you know the answers. If you find that you are having difficulty answering the questions, review the material until you think you can answer the questions. It is important that you read the Bible passages referenced as some questions may be based on the Bible text.

## **How Your Exams Are Graded**

Your instructor will mark any incorrectly answered questions. You will be referred back to the place in the course where the correct answer is to be found. After finishing this course with a passing average, you will be awarded a certificate.

If you enrolled in a class, submit your exam papers to the leader or secretary of the class who will send them for the entire group to the Correspondence School.

See the back of the exam booklet for more information on returning the exams for grading.

# 1

## THE CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP (1 JOHN 1:1–2:2)

### **Introduction to First John**

John's first letter is like a family photo album. It describes those who are members of the family of God. Just as children resemble their parents, so God's children have His likeness too. This letter describes the similarities. When a person becomes a child of God, he receives the life of God—eternal life. All who have this life show it in very definite ways. For instance, they acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, they love God, they love the children of God, they obey His commandments, and they do not go on sinning. These, then, are some of the tests of eternal life. John wrote this letter so that all who have these family traits may know that they have eternal life (1 John 5:13).

At the time John was writing, a false sect had arisen known as Gnostics. These people claimed to be Christians, but they said that they had additional knowledge, superior to what the apostles taught. Among other things, they taught that Jesus was just a man, born of Joseph and Mary. They said that the Christ was not a person but a mere influence that came out from God. According to them, Jesus was not Christ; rather, the Christ came upon Jesus at the time of His baptism and left Him before He died on the cross. John realized that these people were not real Christians, and so he warned his readers against them by showing that these Gnostics did not have the marks of true children of God.

According to John, a person either is a child of God or he is not; there is no in-between ground. That is why this letter is filled with such extreme

opposites as light and darkness, love and hatred, truth and lie, death and life, God and the devil. At the same time, it should be noted that the apostle likes to describe people by their habitual behavior. In discerning between Christians and non-Christians, for instance, he does not base his

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conclusion on a single act of sin, but rather on what usually characterizes the person. Even a broken clock tells the correct time twice in every twenty-four hours—but a good clock tells the correct time regularly. So the general, day-by-day behavior of a Christian is holy and righteous, and by this he is known as a child of God.

John uses the word “know” a great many times. The Gnostics professed to *know* the truth, but John here sets forth the true facts of the Christian faith, which can be *known* with certainty. He describes God as light (1:5); love (4:8, 16); truth (5:6); and life (5:20). This does not mean that God is not a Person, but rather that God is the source of these four blessings. John also speaks of God as righteous (2:29; 3:7); pure (3:3); and sinless (3:5). While John uses simple words, the thoughts he expresses are often very difficult to understand. As you study these lessons, therefore, you should pray that the Lord will help you to grasp the meaning of His Word and to obey the truth as He reveals it to you.

## **The Person of Christ (1:1-2)**

The doctrinal foundation of all true fellowship is the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. There can be no true fellowship with those who hold false views concerning Him. The first two verses teach His eternity and the reality of His incarnation. The same One who existed from all eternity with God the Father came down into this world as a real Man. The reality of His incarnation is indicated by the fact that the apostles heard Him, saw Him with their eyes, gazed upon Him with deep meditation, and actually handled Him. The Word of Life was not a mere passing illusion, but was a real Person in a body of flesh.

Verse 2 confirms that the One who was with the Father, and whom John calls “that eternal life,” became flesh and dwelt among us and was seen by the apostles.

## The Testimony of the Apostles (1:3-4)

The apostles did not keep this wonderful news as a secret, and neither should we. They realized that the basis of all fellowship is found here, and so they declared it freely and fully. All who receive the testimony of the apostles have fellowship with the Father, with His Son Jesus Christ, and also with the apostles and all other believers. What a wonderful thought it is that guilty sinners should ever be brought into fellowship with God the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ! And yet, that is the very truth which we have here.

Notice particularly the expression in verse 3, “His Son Jesus Christ.” Here we learn that Jesus and Christ are one and the same Person, and that that Person is the Son of God. Jesus is the name that was given to

Him at His birth; it speaks of His perfect humanity. Christ is the name that speaks of Him as God’s Anointed One, the Messiah. Therefore, in the name Jesus Christ, we have a witness to His humanity and to His deity. Jesus Christ is very God of very God and very Man of very Man.

But why does John thus write concerning the subject of fellowship? The reason is that our joy may be full. John realized that the world is not capable of providing true and lasting joy for the human heart. This joy can only come through proper relationship with God. When a person is in fellowship with God and with the Lord Jesus, he has a deep-seated joy that cannot be disturbed by earthly circumstances. As the poet said, “The source of all his singing is high in heaven above.”

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 true and lasting joy  
 for the human heart.**  
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## The Requirements of Fellowship (1:5-10)

Fellowship describes a situation where two or more persons share things in common. It is a communion or a partnership. John now undertakes to instruct his readers as to the requirements for fellowship with God. In doing so, he appeals to the teachings of the Lord Jesus when He was here upon earth. Although the Lord is not quoted as having used these exact words, the sum and substance of His teaching was that “God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all.” By this He meant that God is absolutely holy, absolutely righteous, and absolutely pure. God cannot look with favor on any form of sin. Nothing is hidden with Him, but “all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (Heb. 4:13).

Now it follows that in order for a person to be in fellowship with God, there can be no hiding of sin. Light and darkness cannot exist in a person's life at the same time, any more than they can exist together in the room of a home. If a man is walking in darkness, he is not in fellowship with God. A man who says he has fellowship with God and walks in darkness was never saved at all.

On the other hand, if one walks in the light, then he can have fellowship with the Lord and with his fellow Christians. As far as John is concerned in this passage, a man is either in the light or in darkness. If he is in the light, he is a member of God's family. If he is in darkness, he does not have anything in common with God because there is no darkness in God at all. Those who walk in the light, that is, those who are Christians, have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses them from all sin. The latter part of this verse does not mean that a Christian is constantly cleansed by the blood, but rather that the one cleansing received at conversion has continuing value. Christians are cleansed once by the blood of Christ but washed constantly by the Word of God from defilement along the way.

Then again, fellowship with God requires that we acknowledge the truth concerning ourselves. For instance, verse 8 tells us that to deny that we have a sinful nature means self-deception and untruthfulness.

In order to enter into the Christian fellowship, there must be confession of sins. "He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy" (Prov. 28:13). The promise of God's Word is that if a man confesses his sins, God is faithful and just to forgive. He is faithful to forgive these sins in the sense that He has promised to do so and will abide by His promise. He is just to forgive them in the sense that this forgiveness was purchased through the work of Christ, and God can righteously forgive because He was completely satisfied with Christ's payment. In addition, God promises to cleanse the repentant sinner from all unrighteousness.

Thus, in order to enter into the Christian fellowship, a sinner must take sides with God against himself. He must acknowledge his sins and forsake them. Forgiven through the precious blood of Christ, he can now go on in

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————— ❧ —————



happy fellowship with God. But verse 9 may also apply to the lives of those who are already saved. Just as we enter the Christian fellowship through repentance and faith, so, day-by-day fellowship with God is maintained through confession of our sins. When we first confess our sins as penitent sinners, we receive what is known as *judicial forgiveness*. This means that the penalty of sins has been put away once for all. As Christians, we confess our sins daily and receive *parental forgiveness*. This means that the happy family spirit is restored and possible parental discipline is averted. The latter is the forgiveness of a father rather than that of a judge.

Finally, in order to be in fellowship with God, we must not deny that we have committed acts of sin. God has stated over and over in His Word that all have sinned. To deny this is to make God a liar. It is a flat contradiction of His Word and a complete denial of the reason for which the Lord Jesus came to suffer, bleed, and die.

Thus we see that fellowship with God does not require lives of sinlessness, but rather requires that all our sins should be brought out into His presence, confessed, and forsaken. It means that we must be absolutely honest about our condition, and that there be no hypocrisy or hiding of what we really are.

## **Sin Spoils Fellowship (2:1-2)**

In these two verses, John gives us God's perfect standard for His people and His gracious provision in the event of failure. The expression "my little children" might better have been translated "dear children." It refers to all the members of the family of God. God's perfect standard is then set forth in the words, "these things I write to you, that you may not sin." Because God is perfect, His standard for His people is absolute perfection. He would not be God if He said, "these things I write to you that you sin just as little as you can." God cannot condone sin in the least degree, and so He sets perfection before us as the goal. The Lord Jesus did this with the woman who was taken in the act of adultery; He said, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more" (John 8:11).

At the same time, the Lord knows our frame (Ps. 103:14). He remembers that we are dust, and so He has graciously made provision for us in the event of failure. This is expressed in the following words, "And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." An advocate is one who comes to the side of another person in time of need

in order to help. This is exactly what the Lord Jesus does for us when we sin. He immediately comes to us in order to restore us to fellowship with Himself. Notice that it does not say, “If any man confess his sins. . . .” As our Advocate, the Lord seeks to bring us to the place where we *do* confess and forsake our sin.

There is something very wonderful in this verse which the student should not overlook. It says, “If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father.” It does not say with God, but rather, with the Father. In other words, He is still our Father even if we sin. This reminds us of the blessed truth that though sin in a believer’s life breaks fellowship, it does not break relationship. When a person is born again, he becomes a child of God. God is henceforth his Father, and nothing can ever affect that relationship. A birth is something that cannot be undone. A son may disgrace his father, but he is still a son by the fact of birth.

Notice that our Advocate is Jesus Christ the righteous. It is good to have a righteous Advocate. When Satan brings some accusation against a believer, the Lord Jesus can point to His finished work on Calvary’s cross and say, “Charge that sin to My account.”

And the Lord Jesus is not only our Advocate; He is also the propitiation for our sins. This means that by dying for us, He freed us from the guilt of our sins and restored us to God by providing the needed satisfaction and by removing every barrier to fellowship. God can show mercy to us because Christ has satisfied the claims of justice. It is not often that an advocate (or lawyer) pays for his client’s sins; yet that is what our Lord has done, and most remarkable of all, He paid for them by the sacrifice of Himself.

John adds that He is the propitiation not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world. This does not, of course, mean that the whole world is saved. Rather it means that the work of the Lord Jesus is *sufficient* in value to save all the world. It is, however, only *efficient* to save those who actually put their trust in Him. It is because His work is sufficient for all men that the gospel can be offered to all the world. But if all men were automatically saved, there would be no need to preach the gospel to them.

It is interesting to remember that the superscription on the cross was written in words of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. These were the principal languages of the then-known world. It was thus proclaimed to all the world that Jesus Christ is a sufficient Savior for all men everywhere.

THE  
LETTERS OF

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JOHN

**EXAM BOOKLET**  
**AK '08 (1 UNIT) EJ**

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STUDENT NAME (PLEASE PRINT)

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ADDRESS

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CITY, STATE, ZIP

COURSE GRADE: \_\_\_\_\_

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INSTRUCTOR



*Exam developed by Emmaus Correspondence School, founded in 1942.*

## A NOTE ON THE EXAMS

The exams are designed to check your knowledge of the course material and the Scriptures. After you have studied a chapter, review the exam questions for that lesson. If you have difficulty in answering the questions, re-read the material. If questions contain a Scripture reference, you may use your Bible to help you answer them. If your instructor has provided a single page Answer Sheet, record your answer on that sheet. This exam contains the following types of questions:

### **MULTIPLE CHOICE**

You will be asked to write in the letter of the correct answer at the space on the right. Here is an example:

The color of grass is

- A. blue                      C. yellow  
B. green                     D. orange

     **B**     

### **WHAT DO YOU SAY?**

Questions headed this way are designed to help you express your ideas and feelings. You may freely state your own opinions in answer to such questions.

### **RETURNING THE EXAM**

See the back of this exam booklet for instructions on returning your exam for grading.

**DO NOT PHOTOCOPY THESE EXAM PAGES**

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# CHAPTER 1 EXAM

## THE CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

### EXAM GRADE

***Before starting this exam, write your name and address on the front of this Exam Booklet.***

*Directions: Read each question carefully and write the letter of the correct answer in the blank space on the right. Use the separate answer sheet if provided.*

1. John's first letter is likened to
 

A. a company policy manual	C. a family photo album	
B. a national constitution	D. a religious creed	_____
  
2. The Gnostics
 

A. claimed to have additional knowledge superior to that taught by the apostles		
B. were Christians who lived outside the Roman Empire		
C. were noted for their scholarship and preaching gospel truth		
D. were Greek mercenaries in the pay of the Roman armed forces		_____
  
3. Which of the following is a characteristic feature of John's letter? It contains
 

A. simple words and simple concepts		
B. simple words but profound concepts		
C. difficult words but simple concepts		
D. difficult words and difficult concepts		_____
  
4. The doctrinal foundation of all true Christian fellowship is centered in
 

A. Christian baptism		
B. the Lord's Supper		
C. the truth of the Lord's return		
D. the Person of Christ		_____
  
5. The apostles knew the reality of what they taught about Christ because they had
 

A. heard Him speak		
B. seen and watched Him		
C. actually touched Him		
D. experienced all the above		_____

- 6. When John says that “God is light,” he is conveying that
  - A. Jesus was fair complexioned
  - B. God is absolutely holy
  - C. God dwells in light brighter than the sun
  - D. God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent\_\_\_\_\_
  
- 7. A Christian who says that he no longer commits sins is
  - A. a very holy person indeed
  - B. the kind of person who ought to be a church elder
  - C. self-deceived
  - D. someone all others should copy\_\_\_\_\_
  
- 8. A Christian who wants to enjoy fellowship with God must
  - A. wait till he gets to heaven
  - B. live in solitude
  - C. reach a state of victory over every sin in his life
  - D. confess his sins to God and forsake them\_\_\_\_\_
  
- 9. God’s standard of behavior for His people is that of
  - A. absolute perfection
  - B. relative morality
  - C. ritual cleanliness
  - D. doing our best\_\_\_\_\_
  
- 10. The Lord Jesus is presented to us by John as our
  - A. elder Brother
  - B. Advocate
  - C. Great High Priest
  - D. Prophet, Priest, and King\_\_\_\_\_

**WHAT DO YOU SAY?**

What elements of Christ’s person revealed in this passage prompt you to both worship Him and tell others about Him?

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