International Bible Study Commentary
Verse-by-Verse Bible Lessons Thru the Bible
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1 John 1:1-10 Commentary
New Revised Standard Version

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Study Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the *International Bible Study Commentary* website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the *International Bible Study Forum*.

Introduction

The three **Letters of John** and the **Gospel of John** were written by the Apostle John (the brother of James, the sons of Zebedee). The complete *International Bible Study Commentary* on the **Gospel of John** is available online for those who have not studied it. Those who have studied the **Gospel of John** will recognize John's application of Jesus' teachings in the three **Letters of John**. In 1 John 1:1-10 John introduces some of the themes he will discuss in more depth; therefore, the first Bible Lesson will be the longest in our study of First John. If a leader or teacher does not complete the first lesson during the time allotted, there should be time to finish the first lesson and do the second lesson at your next meeting. May the Holy Spirit guide your study and lead you into a closer fellowship with the God the Father, His Son Jesus Christ, and His true followers.

(1 John 1:1) 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—

John did not address First John to a specific person as he did Second John and Third John. He purposely wrote his letter for those who believe in Jesus Christ. In 1 John 5:13, he wrote, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.” Followers of Jesus Christ can know that they have eternal life. John probably meant for his letter to be copied and shared with other churches—to those who had heard him teach and/or to those who had read his gospel. His letter began by explaining who sent the letter, but without naming the sender (like John did in the Gospel of John, where he did not name the writer). His use of “we” indicates that his letter would reveal the experiences and teachings of Jesus’ original eleven disciples who became apostles, so in some sense his letter’s teaching came from them all. “What was from the beginning” meant *from the beginning of Jesus’ ministry* His disciples experienced and learned from Jesus as they followed Him. John may also have wanted his readers to remember how he described Jesus in John 1:1, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (which he will further explain in the following verses of his letter). John then described the foundation of their (the disciples) testimony about Jesus and why they were reliable witnesses. From the moment Jesus called them to follow Him, they “heard” Jesus’ teaching with their own ears. They did not repeat what they heard someone else say Jesus said, and neither did John in his gospel or his letters. They repeated what they themselves heard Jesus say directly to them, to the crowds, to the authorities, and to others. Thus, they personally witnessed what they taught about Jesus and what Jesus said and did. They saw Jesus with their own eyes. The words “what we have looked at” indicated that they had carefully examined and verified the truth of all they had seen and heard from Jesus (during approximately three years of His ministry). Therefore, their testimony came from their personal understanding of Jesus and had a depth of meaning which was more than simply reporting facts about what Jesus said and did as a contemporary newscaster might do from time to time. Jesus had carefully explained the truth to them, and they had come to understand the deeper meaning of what they saw and heard from Him. They knew the truth from and about Jesus and they taught the truth they learned. The words, “touched with our hands” indicated that Jesus was a real physical human being (not a mere ghost or spirit): they could touch

Jesus with their hands. Jesus, the Son of God, came as a man and John even saw the blood and the water that poured forth from Jesus' side when the soldier pierced Him with a spear (John 19:34). For those who had read John's gospel or had heard him teach, John reminded his readers of what Jesus told Thomas after he rose from the dead in John 20:27, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." When the disciples saw and listened to Jesus, they had physically seen and heard "the Word of life" ["Word" is preferred over the NRSV "word"]. A word can be spoken and heard, but usually not seen unless written. John wrote that in Jesus "the Word of life" could be physically heard, seen, and touched. The "Word of life" in his letter would remind the readers of what his gospel taught in John 1:4, where he wrote about Jesus, "in him was life, and the life was the light of all people" and in John 1:14, "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth" [NASB is preferred: "the only begotten from the Father"].

(1 John 1:2) this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—

The Word of Life was revealed to the disciples and to all who saw Jesus. Because Jesus ascended into heaven after His resurrection from the dead, John and the other disciples had the responsibility (given to them by Jesus) of testifying (as though they were eyewitnesses giving evidence in a court of law) to what they had seen and heard about and from Jesus. In John 17:3, Jesus defined the meaning of "eternal life," by teaching, "And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." John wrote his gospel and his letters so his readers might come to know "the only true God, and Jesus Christ" whom the Father had sent. As John will teach in his letter, to "know" the only true God will involve a fellowship or a communion or a personal relationship with the Father and the Son, which is an indication that a believer in Jesus has eternal life in Jesus Christ. John declared, preached, and wrote that Jesus Christ is "the eternal life," the Giver of eternal life, and He was with the Father, but He came into the world and revealed himself in the world. In John 3:16, John

testified to what Jesus had declared, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” In his letter, John will describe how a follower of Jesus can believe in and receive eternal life, and the difference that will make in this life and throughout eternity. In 1 John 5:11, John explained, “And this is the testimony: God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.” Eternal life cannot be separated from an everlasting knowledge, communion, relationship and fellowship with God the Father and the Son.

(1 John 1:3) 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.

As John wrote his letter, he continued to refer to Jesus’ disciples (who became apostles) as “we,” as those who testified to the good news of what they had personally seen and heard in Jesus Christ. As the Church grew in numbers, the Apostle Paul listed the various leaders in the Church as gifts from Jesus Christ to believers. As gifts of Jesus Christ, these leaders based all their work and teaching on what the first disciples had seen and heard. In Ephesians 4:11-13, Paul wrote, “The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.” Notice: Jesus Christ gave these gifts, these leaders, teachers, and others, to the Church “until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.” The only way for believers in the Church “to come to the unity of the faith” is to first come a true “knowledge of the Son of God.” Therefore, true Christian faith must be based on the truths that Jesus taught, truths that the apostles wrote in the New Testament. The Holy Spirit guided the writers of the New Testament so people could learn the truth. John wrote his letter because he wanted his readers to join this *fellowship of believers* where they could enjoy, among other blessings, “the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.” But even more than fellowship with other believers, John wanted his readers to come into fellowship “with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.”

(1 John 1:4) We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

John wrote about Jesus because he wanted his readers' joy to be complete. Their joy could not be complete without knowing the Father and Jesus; therefore, John wrote so his readers could truly know about and come into fellowship with the Father and the Son. Believers remain joyful because they live daily in fellowship or in communion with the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, and other believers. Jesus' gift of eternal life to believers is the gift of himself to live within them, which brings joy to believers in Jesus. Even if confined in a solitary cell, believers know the joy their relationship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit gives them in their hearts.

(1 John 1:5) This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all.

When John wrote in his gospel about John the Baptist, he said in John 1:7 and 9, "He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world." In his letter, John proclaimed the message of Jesus, the true light, who had revealed himself to them and who had enlightened them. In his letter, John wrote, "God is light." The Son revealed the truth about the Father and himself, truth that can enlighten people that all might believe in the Father and the Son. Furthermore, no darkness, no deceit, no deception, no dishonestly, no error, and no falsehood can be found in or expressed by the Father or the Son. No darkness, no evil, no wrongdoing exists in God.

(1 John 1:6) If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true;

Based on the truths John previously described, John began to apply these truths to the way of life that all true believers in the Father and the Son should pursue. True believers in and followers of Jesus Christ should not walk in darkness, which refers to a person's way of life. Walking is moving and going in some direction. Walking can become a way of life. Walking is intentional and includes one or more goals of someone. A person might

walk to a supermarket daily for the exercise and to buy food. Walking in darkness involves pursuing a way of life that includes deceit, deception, dishonesty, error, and falsehood to achieve one or more goals. John wrote that if we are walking in darkness, we cannot truthfully say that we have fellowship or communion with Jesus Christ. John puts the matter starkly. If we say we are followers of Jesus Christ while at the same time we are walking down a path of life that includes deceit, deception, and dishonesty, then we are telling lies and we are not doing what is true. John writes about two ways of life, and there are only two, we either walk in the light or we walk in the darkness no matter what we say. Thank God Jesus came to enlighten us and die for us so we could turn from walking in darkness to walking in the light. In this life, believers in Jesus will not live perfectly, nor will they live in darkness, practice evil, or walk with sinful purposes.

(1 John 1:7) 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.

In this verse, John begins to teach us more good news. No one needs to walk in darkness. Even though we have sinned, we can have fellowship with God the Father and Jesus His Son. Jesus Christ shed His blood when He died on the cross to cleanse us from ALL sin. In 1 John 3:4, John defined sin, “Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.” Walking in darkness or walking in sin is practicing lawlessness. Sinful living involves practicing lawlessness as a way of life or with an ultimate intention to disobey God rather than love and obey God. As we learn more about what God the Father has done for us through His Son, we will learn more about how to be cleansed from ALL sin. To be cleansed from all sin, John emphasized that true believers in Jesus will turn from practicing lawlessness, from walking in darkness, from doing what is evil, and they will turn to walking in the light, to loving Jesus and obeying His commands, to walking in the truth with an enlightened mind, to walking spiritually in fellowship with Jesus who is walking in the light, and to having fellowship with the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit and other believers in the Church (when this is humanly possible in the Church as led by the Holy Spirit). By the grace of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit helps people

turn from walking in darkness to walking in the light and to knowing they are cleansed from all sin by the grace of Jesus Christ. Paul described how believers turn from darkness to light with these words in Ephesians 2:8-10, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life." We will learn more about what this means and how to walk in the light as we learn more about Jesus and His teachings in John's letters and gospel.

(1 John 1:8) If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

No one can truthfully say they have never sinned, have never been lawless, have never been deceitful, deceptive, or dishonest. If we have ever sinned, if we have ever been lawless, we need to be cleansed from all sin. [True and lasting joy will be given to us after Jesus cleanses us from all sin and comes to live within us through the Holy Spirit.] If we live long enough, when we are honest with ourselves in the light of God's Word, we might even be able to say that at one time we walked in darkness, lived a sinful life, and practiced lawlessness in a variety of ways, and we are ashamed and sorry and thankful that Jesus came to save us from practicing sin and the eternal consequences of sin. Thankfully, the Bible teaches that Jesus Christ can cleanse us from ALL sin and do many other things to help us. As believers in the Word of God, we know that whenever we hear someone who is walking in darkness say they have never been lawless, have never sinned and therefore have no sin, we know they are deceiving themselves and the truth is not in them. We can enlighten them when we teach them about Jesus, but they may not listen, and we cannot make them believe the truth and turn to Jesus for cleansing, so we pray for the Holy Spirit to help them.

(1 John 1:9) If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

In this verse, John gives us more good news, as he will do throughout this letter by leading us and enlightening us step-by-step. The good news for sinners includes the fact that God by grace through faith in Jesus Christ will

forgive us for our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. God will not eternally punish us or hold our sins against us; instead, God will cleanse us from all the moral unrighteousness we have and feel because of our sins. God will make us new people. All we need to do is believe in Jesus and what Jesus taught and confess our sins to God, which will involve turning from practicing lawlessness. We will not become perfect in this life, but we will become better as new creations in Christ Jesus, and Jesus will give us a perfect Helper, the Holy Spirit, to live within us so we do not practice sin again or walk in darkness as a way of life. If we do sin again, the Holy Spirit will help us confess our sin and turn from walking in darkness, lawlessness, and sinfulness. John wrote that Jesus' followers can have absolute confidence in the truth that *if we confess our sins, then God will forgive us and cleanse us from ALL unrighteousness*. A believer's confidence rests on the fact that God is faithful and just. God is faithful and keeps all His promises. God is just, because Jesus Christ came to die a sacrificial death so God could justly, mercifully, and lovingly forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. We do not need to understand "how God does this through Jesus," we only need to believe the good news that Jesus will bless us when we do as He has commanded and confess our sins to God.

(1 John 1:10) If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

In concluding the first chapter in his letter, John repeated and expanded what he taught earlier. If we say we have never been lawless; that is, if we say we have never disobeyed a revealed law of God as revealed to our conscience or as revealed in the Bible, then we call God a liar. If we deny God's evaluation of us, we call God a liar. If we do not believe God's promises to us, we call God a liar. If we think we do not need to obey Jesus' commands, we call Jesus a lair. If we do not believe the Bible is true, the word of God, we call God a liar. There is no darkness in God, so God does not tell lies. Furthermore, no matter what we might claim to be, perhaps a follower of Christ or a believer in God, if we say we have never sinned or broken God's moral law, the law requiring us to love God and others, then obviously, the word (the teachings) of God have no influence with us and the Word of God ["his word", the Son of the Father] does not live within us.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. What did John declare to his readers?

2. What did John want his readers to have?

3. What was the message that John proclaimed?

4. What did John say is the result of walking in the light?

5. What did John say is the result of confessing our sins?

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