



# Its All About JESUS

## The Letters of John

Patrick J. Griffiths

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## An Introduction to 1 John

This series of readings find us studying **THE FIRST LETTER OF JOHN**. It is a short letter [shortest in NT], but packed with wonderful truth. The early church was visited by “wolves in sheep’s clothing” (Acts 20:28, 29; 1 John 2:19). Their presence agitated the flock. Like real sheep when intruders are present, there is a significant unsettling affect that takes place. Pastor John works to identify the wolf and bring peace to his people. His intent is to calm the people **NOT CAUSE THEM AGITATION**. First John is not a test. First John is a reminder of all one has **IN CHRIST**. It is my prayer that John’s words would worm there way into our hearts and minds and bring the peace that is ours **IN CHRIST JESUS**.

In the absence of any personal surmising as to why John wrote, let us simply read the various verses telling us his reasons for writing.

<sup>1</sup> 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-- <sup>2</sup> and the life was manifested, and we have seen and testify and **proclaim** to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us-- <sup>3</sup> what we have seen and heard we **proclaim** to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup> These things we **write**, so that our joy may be made complete. (1 John 1:1-4)

My little children, I am **writing** these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; (1 John 2:1)

<sup>7</sup> Beloved, I am not **writing** a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard. <sup>8</sup> On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true Light is already shining. (1 John 2:7, 8)

I am **writing** to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake. (1 John 2:12)

<sup>13</sup> I am **writing** to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am **writing** to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have **written** to you, children, because you know the Father. <sup>14</sup> I have **written** to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have **written** to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one. (1 Jo 2:13, 14)

I have not **written** to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie is of the truth. (1 John 2:21)

These things I have **written** to you concerning those who are trying to deceive you. (1 John 2:26)

These things I have **written** to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life. (1 John 5:13)

Yet what prompted him to write? The Letter itself will tell us there were wolves in sheep's clothing and their activity was undermining the confidence and security of faith in Jesus Christ. John's pastoral words are meant to soothe the agitated congregation. It is the prayer of every Pastor/Elder that the sheep would rest in the chief Shepherd. John's intent is not calling into question the genuineness of their faith or to create doubt, but rather to produce confidence. As we study John's words may our confidence in JESUS

continue to grow and may we find Him always to be enough in this life and in the life to come.

It is imperative that we note background information to the epistle in order to see the epistle in its historical context. Such a study adds depth of understanding to the “hunt.” Let us remember Advent and the coming of the Christ; let us remember Passion Week and Resurrection Sunday and the completion of the Blood Picture; let us remember Pentecost and Peter’s invitation to believe in Jesus; and let us remember the thrust of the Book of Hebrews. By remembering, let us recognize that His entire *Story* and our story hinges on who Jesus is, what Jesus did/does, and who we are in Him.

John is telling this *Story* and by telling this *Story* he defends it.

John presents his material through a series of contrasts. John presents for his audience a contrast between truth and error, between belief and unbelief. Each one of his purpose statements raises a standard against which error is measured and found to be wanting.

This letter is an excellent opportunity for today’s believer to arm himself against the deceiver’s onslaughts in his attempt to overthrow true faith.

May God grant us eyes that see and ears that hear.

# A Living Christ: A Prologue

## 1 John 1:1-4

I greet you in the name of Him who was from the beginning (1 John 1:1). Now that's a mouth full! This chapter finds us studying 1 John 1:1-4. John's words are in direct contradistinction to those who were denying the humanity of Jesus the Christ. Every time I begin a fresh study of God's Word in its biblical and historical context, I am humbled by the Holy Spirit's work in me. As believers, we share His anointing so that we might believe JESUS is the "in fleshed/incarnate" CHRIST. John's word is direct and consequential. To deny this message is to be a deceiver and an antichrist. Few like confrontation thus we have a tendency to play "patty-cake" with the doctrine of CHRISTOLOGY, but John would say otherwise. He is in blood earnest over this foundational/fundamental truth.

If John's intent is to calm the congregation in light of those who would deny Jesus came in the flesh, then there can be little question in the opening paragraph how John establishes the reality of the incarnation and the celebration of human flesh/nature by noting its actual existence in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

There is in today's church a void between ritual and relationship. We have become Christians without knowing Christ. Our relationship with Christ is often sterile and tentative instead of inviting and celebrative. This is not the Christ of John. John invites us into the reality of true faith, testifying to the reality of a living Christ. He introduces us to the idea of fellowship. We have fellowship with God and with one another because we are redeemed and forgiven.



For the New Testament writers, fellowship is a consequence of the cross, a consequence of God's grace. It is given, not earned.

Before there was anything, there was/is God, in Trinity. There is the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Within themselves there is perfect unity, harmony, and joy. Their relationship is unmarked by anything dark or strained or tentative. There is no need of hiding for there is no fear of condemnation, rejection or shame. We are incapable of fully experiencing the **fellowship** they enjoy among themselves. Yet God desired to share this relationship that He has within Himself as Trinity with the work of His hands. Our world is the context for the placement of man for this encounter. God created a Garden where He would encounter humanity and where in this encounter their joy would be full. That joy is the expression of this **fellowship**.

We can have this fellowship with God and with one another because God sent His Son to be the Savior of the world. When one speaks of fellowship they are speaking of the joy God has within Himself shared with us in shadow form. Fellowship is life on life, it is participation with others, but it is immersed in a context where there is no fear of condemnation, rejection or shame. Because of our sinfulness we have all the above, yet the gospel answers all of those questions.

Some of you have never experienced the love of God, the fellowship of God, because you have never been with anyone without thinking of condemnation, rejection or shame. Friend, God knows the truth about you and He still loves you without condition, accepts you without requirement, forgives you without limit, favors you without

merit and serves you without reward. And if, if, this is true of God, then how can it be any less true for us? The reason why we have a lack of fellowship in the gospel is because we have never really experienced the kind of fellowship God enjoys within Himself. May God push us past our fears and may we embrace the freedom that is already ours in Christ.

John testifies of his personal and intimate knowledge of the Word. This Word is tangible, visible and foundational. The Word of Life, our Lord Jesus Christ, is the very essence of John's world. John understood what is meant to live a Christ life.

Friend, there is a well that we are invited to draw from that will satisfy our most intimate longings. Come and drink and you will find that He is enough.

# Confessing Jesus as the Incarnate Christ

1 John 1:5-2:2

I greet you IN JESUS NAME. I cannot think of anything more warm, celebrative and soothing than such a greeting. We can greet one another in His name. It is a name that is above all names and at His name every tongue will confess and every knee will bow that He is LORD to the glory of God the Father.

Our text in this study runs from 1 John 1:5-2:2. Included in this text is 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Through the years I have spent a lot of time answering what I believe to be a mishandling and misappropriation of 1 John 1:9. My intent in this study is not to speak to what I perceive to be the "problem," but rather to consider what this text (or any text for that matter) means in its context (1 John 1:5-2:2) and within the Letter of 1 John and the historical context (i.e. Gnostics) that prompted the response John wrote.

Perhaps without exception very few evangelical Christians are unaware of 1 John 1:9.

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Most are able to recite the verse from memory. However, are we as familiar with the context surrounding 1 John 1:9? Many have been taught how sin breaks fellowship with God and the only way to restore such fellowship is to confess their sins in order to receive His forgiveness and thereby restore their walk/fellowship with God. Our desire at WBC

has been to consider the text of Scripture in its biblical context and what drove the author to write (i.e. historical context). I am of the opinion that 1 John 1:9 has been mishandled and thus misappropriated by much of the church. This mishandling and misappropriation instead of liberating the people of God has minimized the gospel and enslaved God's people to senseless introspection, anxious uncertainty and a misguided defining of the Christian life.

First, I believe John's use of fellowship has more to do with the larger idea of God's redemptive work and the resultant body produced by that redemptive work and one's relationship to both.

Second, I believe saving faith recognizes one's own sinfulness and the sole solution for that sinfulness in JESUS who is the INCARNATE CHRIST. Anything other than this is non-redemptive.

Third, once the believer accepts JESUS as the INCARNATE CHRIST he is placed in JESUS and thus lives/walks/practices JESUS.

Fourth, as a consequence of being IN CHRIST, His people walk and confess, even though they still sin. The good news in all of this is, "HE IS OUR ADVOCATE WHO SATISFIES (i.e. PROPITIATES) GOD'S JUDGMENT AGAINST ME AND MY SIN."

For Pastor John the issue is singular. You either confess JESUS as the INCARNATE CHRIST or you **reject** such a claim. Thus, you are either **lost** without JESUS or you are **IN JESUS**.

Do you recognize who you are in light of who He is? You are a sinner in desperate need of THE SAVIOR. As believers we are not to sin . . . But when we sin we have an ADVOCATE and His name is JESUS. JESUS is the only one who can satisfy God's justice against us.

In light of this, we should no more single out 1 John 1:9 than we would 1 John 1:7 or 1 John 2:1. Each of those elements celebrates a single truth. JESUS IS ENOUGH . . . May you feel the warmth of God's incredible embrace as we wallow in the immeasurable provision found in His Son.

# Completing the Circle

## 1 John 2:3-11

This lesson finds us in 1 John 2:3-11. As we study Pastor John's Letter my interest and passion for Jesus and His church increases. Much of our lives are lived in the abstract. Our Christian faith is very nebulous and "watery." It is like thinned gruel that has no sticking power thus we limp along hungry and thirsty. Pastor John would have none of this. If asked "do we love the brethren," we answer in the affirmative because we answer in the abstract. "Of course I love Christians." Yet should we ask "do we love the local church, this local church, our local church," we challenge the very make-up and integrity of the question itself. But this is **John's point**. Pastor John is charging those who left the church of not loving God. Man oh man oh man, talk about rocking the proverbial boat.

John's Letter to the churches of Asia Minor is compelling in its simplicity. John echoes the words of JESUS when responding to the question concerning the great commandment, "Love God; Love your neighbor." John says it as, "Love God; Love your brother." John assures us in 1 John 2:5 that loving one another completes the circle. You cannot say you love God without equally and also loving His church. To love the head without loving the body is illogical and impossible.

I believe John's language in his Letter concerning "brothers" is euphemistic for "local church." By the local church it is meant Pastor John, the Elders and the gathered congregation. It must be remembered the reason for writing is prompted by those who would not agree with the

position of Pastor John, the Elders and the gathered church concerning the person and work of JESUS. They left [or were forced to leave] the local church. As such, those who left the church hated Pastor John, the Elders and the gathered church.

Pastor John points out how such animosity toward the very body of Christ is a telltale sign of a non-love for God. You cannot say you love God and not love God's church. We can assume those who left still thought they were theologically right. They probably still gathered with a group of likeminded people for "Bible" study and fellowship. They probably still professed a love for God; they simply saw no place for the assembly. We must make no mistake here, Pastor John says those who left and who have dismissed and denigrated the church are wrong; dead wrong. And if they do not repent, they shall perish.

John is targeting those who have denied Jesus and have left their fellowship/local church. He is identifying them as those who do not keep His commandments, do not abide in Him and do not walk in the same way Jesus walked. John now tells us why he knows this. John knows they are not keeping His commandments because they do not love the brothers and sisters in the church. John knows they do not abide in Jesus because they have left the church. John knows they are not walking as His walks because they are not continuing in the fellowship of the local church.

Are we not able to see how our present experience parallels so well what they were encountering in 90AD? Hoards of professing Christians, well intended Christians, spiritual Christians, have left the local church over various and sundry issues and have never become a part of a local

church again. Friends, this is neither right nor healthy. Pastor John would see such behavior as abnormal and an aberration of God's redemptive work in Jesus.

Most of those who left and have never returned to the local assembly would never speak of a disdain for the "church universal" or of believers in general, but the local church is the object of their scorn.

I'm going to change the reading of this text to reflect what I believe is John's meaning. My purpose is to show how people never speak of hating the body of Christ, but they do have significant animosity toward local churches. For example, no one claiming to be a Christian speaks of hating Christians. Yet we have a significant amount of professing Christians who claim to be followers of Jesus but never support a local church or they speak of the local church with indifference or claim they do not need the local church because they have their "Christian coffee group" that meets weekly. Pastor John would know none of this.

The one who says he is in **JESUS** and yet hates **THE LOCAL CHURCH** is in the darkness until now. The one who loves **THE LOCAL CHURCH** abides in **JESUS** and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But the one who hates **THE LOCAL CHURCH** is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

It should go without saying, but I do not wish to assume anything -- Loving others does not cause you to be **IN JESUS**. Being **IN JESUS** causes you to love others. Our difficulty is trying to determine how much love I must have



individually in order to meet this criterion of loving others. Again, it is imperative we do not separate the individual from the corporate. We struggle with loving certain individuals. That is not what John speaks of. The Gnostics **HATED** the body of Christ, His people. The issue is not the individual, but the church. People who speak of their hate for the church or denigrate the local church are those being addressed in this text. Such people who openly despise the local church are blind and in darkness.

We need to awaken to the vital and necessary place loving the local church has in completing the circle of our love for God. May God continue to increase our affections both for the head and His glorious body. We are together for the gospel.

# Your Sins Have Been Forgiven You

1 John 2:3-11

How thankful I am for our next study. This lesson finds us in 1 John 2:12-14. What a beautiful consequence for those who are IN CHRIST. We are [I am] such messes, yet God sent His only begotten Son to save the likes of you and me. Because of JESUS we are FORGIVEN. Because of JESUS we KNOW God as our FATHER. AND because of JESUS we have OVERCOME the Evil One. Think of your failed moments and then think of the cross. In our messes we must continue to look to Jesus as our Great High Priest.

Often when I read the Word of God I am arrested by the simplicity of what I read and the apparent mutation of its simplicity in the Christian life. Our lives are often facades of biblical truth. We live lives of lies, not because of non-conformity but because we simply fail to rest in what is true. Our lives are like gerbils running on a spinning wheel, trying to earn our performance-based acceptance before God. It isn't that we are bad people with deeply engrained hidden sin always afraid of being found out, but people who simply refuse to rest in His finished work.

Our previous passage (1 John 2:3-11) speaks of "keeping commandments," "abiding in Him," "walking as He walked" and "loving our brothers and sisters in Christ." Yet we have been and continue to be forgiven, walk with God in the cool of the Garden and have overcome the evil one. The first paragraph (2:3-11) is not the cause of the second paragraph (2:12-14). It is because of WHO HE IS AND WHAT HE HAS DONE that we are FORGIVEN, KNOW

AND OVERCOME. What those people, the forgiven, know and overcome people, look like is seen in 2:3-11.

When we find ourselves tired of keeping, abiding and walking, we should ask ourselves why. Why do I find my Christian life so unappealing? Is it JESUS? Or perhaps it is a wrong assessing of what constitutes the Christian life. Life IS hard, but my faith in JESUS isn't. Church life can be hard; relationships can be hard; but JESUS? JESUS does not stand over us demanding. He is not cracking the whip making us do what we loath so that He might be glorified through our duty. His desire is that we would encounter this living Christ and from His life live our lives. Friends, God invites us into His presence. It is mystical and magical, AND it is real and sustaining.

Friends, IN CHRIST we are FORGIVEN, we are INTIMATE WITH HIM and we are OVERCOMING EVIL. These are our birth rights. This is what we have IN HIM. None of these benefits are the consequences of our keeping, abiding, walking or loving. All of this AND MORE is because of WHO HE IS AND WHAT HE DID/DOES and WHO WE ARE IN HIM.

It is here that John gives his audience an understanding of what they are to enjoy as true followers of Jesus Christ. The truth expounded by John "indicate the true position of believers over against the false claims of the opponents of John."<sup>1</sup> Here John sets forth the forgiveness of sins, the knowledge of God, and victory over the powers of evil.

Often the truth described by John is titled *positional truth* as opposed to *practical truth*. In so doing a false dichotomy has been constructed in the minds of God's people. One is

viewed as being intangible and the other practical, one being abstract and the other actual, one being theory and the other pragmatic. One is positional and the other conditional.

Yet, if I am reading the New Testament correctly on this idea, our positional truth is practical, actual and pragmatic. Our positional truth is what gives my practice its foundation and stability. Without positional truth there is no truth. **My practice is simply the shadow of the positional substance.** I have stated this often and let me repeat myself once more, "Position changes practice/condition; condition/practice can never change position." The flow from position to practice is one way. This is the same difficulty with 2:1. Positional truth is "sin not", practical truth is "and *when* you sin." Yet, we are to practice our position.

Pastor John uses three terms of endearment in the paragraph before us: little children, fathers and young men. Is there any significance in the terms used? Some see them as being three age categories found in any society. Others see them as being different levels of spiritual maturity. I will present them as fundamental truths indicative of all true believers. What is true of one is also true of the other two groups. What is said of one group is true of the other two.

May you bathe yourself in the glorious truths of knowing Him.

# Do Not Love the World

## 1 John 2:15-17

Our text for this study is 1 John 2:15-17. Here again we find ourselves in one of those classic Christian passages used to assist others in personal holiness. Pastor John warns against loving the world. Often this text is used by Christians as a means of measure one's spiritual temperature. I think Pastor John has something significantly different than what we think as worldly. The New Testament has a seriousness to it as it relates to our souls. Friend, Pastor John is dead earnest as it relates to your soul and I believe we are to be equally sober by the genuine threat that surrounds us.

This is perhaps one of those passages most Christians are aware of but perhaps even fewer actually know what it means. It is important to remember Pastor John is contrasting the Church congregation against those who have left the Church congregation either by church discipline or by personal choice. His statements are always black and white. There would appear to be very little grey with Pastor John.

He is "accusing" those who have left the Church as loving the world over against loving the Father. If they loved the Father, they would not have left the Church. It is sobering to look at Pastor John's description of the world. The descriptive is symptomatic of those who reject personal sin and accountability and thus reject the imminent and pressing need for Jesus as the Incarnate Christ to be their **ADVOCATE**.

There is a tendency to see sin only in the moment. There is something enticing about sin. It is enjoyable and pleasurable and it delivers in the immediate. Yet there is also something very insidious about sin.

Listen to what the apostle Peter states in 1 Peter 2:11.

“Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to **abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul**” (1 Pet. 2:11).

The apostle Paul tells us in Romans 13:13, 14.

“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and **make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts**” (Rom. 13:14).

The apostle Peter also tells us to resist the devil in 1 Peter 5:8, 9.

<sup>8</sup> “Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. **Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.**  
<sup>9</sup> **But resist him, firm in your faith**” (1 Pet. 5:8, 9).

The issues are more than simply gratifying sensual appetites. The issue goes deeper to whether or not Jesus is the Savior of His people. Does He save them from their sins and is such salvation necessary?

There are people in your life who are seeking to pull you away from God. Like the serpent in the Garden of Eden, they are causing you to doubt the truth of God’s Word. Fight this path you are on and seek God above all else.

Jesus is enough. He is and will meet your needs and wants. I encourage you to lay aside every sin and the weight that

so easily entangles you and I encourage you to look to Jesus who is the author and finisher of faith (Heb. 12:1, 2).

There is something greater at stake than satisfying your fleshly appetites or living a life of abstinence and denial. The issue is the *Story*. The outcome of feeding and yielding to such appetites is a denial of personal sin and the need for a personal Savior. This ties back to 1:5-2:2. All of the ideas Pastor John speaks of are interlocked. The “world” rejects personal sin and accountability and the need for deliverance from it.

In 1 John, those who love the world do not love Jesus.

# It is the Last Hour

## 1 John 2:18-27

Our text for this study is 1 John 2:18-27. We previously pushed back the silver tongued rhetoric of the world (1 John 2:1-7). This text puts us smack dab in the middle of our battle with the antichrist (vv. 18, 19). What an incredible blessing it is to know our own sin and the delicious need of our Savior Jesus. It is because we acted on this knowledge with belief that we have eternal life. The antichrist does everything necessary to keep people from believing this truth. We must understand his plans in order that we might strengthen ourselves against him.

We live in a time of turmoil when spiritual conflict unfolds before our very eyes, yet many are blind to it or reluctant to believe such is really the case. Our sight is blurred because we tie the temperature of our political climate into our Christianity, yet the two are not the same. The rise and fall of nations cause an economic inconvenience and calamity, but the assault waged by antichrists is for the destruction of our souls. Jesus said, "What shall it profit a man if he gains the entire world, yet loses his soul and what can a man give in exchange for his soul?" Often we are upset [and rightly so] by the craziness of our political situation, but we hardly stir at the spiritual struggle taking place all around us. It is as if we have fallen asleep at our posts.

Pastor John does not speak to the state of the nation. He speaks of our enemy, the antichrist. He does not speak of something unreal or distant. The antichrist is at hand. The term antichrist is used only four times in the entire New Testament and all of them are by John in his epistles.



- “Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that **antichrist** shall come, even now are there many **antichrists**; whereby we know that it is the last time” (1 John 2:18).
- “Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is **antichrist**, that denieth the Father and the Son” (1 John 2:22).
- “And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that *spirit* of **antichrist**, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world” (1 John 4:3).
- “For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an **antichrist**” (1 John 1:7).

The coming of the antichrist is a sign of the last hour. Is Pastor John referring to a single antichrist or does he have in mind an attitude that is antichrist? One thing is sure in John’s mind. There is a spirit of rebellion against the incarnation of the Son of God and John was equally convinced that he was living in the last hour.

For Pastor John the threat is real and imminent. The threat is so real that some hearing his voice will fall away by rejecting the lie concerning their sin and Jesus. Such thinking is unsettling -- that some right now in our midst who claim Jesus would perhaps one day reject Jesus. How could such a thing happen? It happens slowly through seduction; the antichrist makes rejection and denial appealing. He did this in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve, he did this with King David and Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:2), he did this with Achan (Josh. 7:1) and Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1ff) [etc.] and he does this with you and me.

Our enemy will leave us dried up, dead and damned, but this isn't how he approaches us. He approaches us with appeal, power, pleasure, possession and pride. He makes us believe "yes we can," when the truth of the matter is "no we can't; only Jesus can." Today as we study this text, let us together determine to continue in our belief concerning our sin and the wonder of our incredible sin-saving Savior, King Jesus. Let us resolve to call people back to Jesus and the protecting work of His people in community. Friend, we must fix our eyes on Jesus the author and finisher of faith.

# He Cannot Sin, Because He is Born of God

1 John 2:28-3:10

Our text for this study is 1 John 2:28-3:10. Pastor John speaks of God as our Father and we as His children. He thinks children act like their parents. Pastor John assures us of the divine DNA woven into their very fabric of our existence. This passages declares to His children their victory over sin. I would encourage you to see how Jesus secures for His people victory over the devil [READ 1 John 3:5, 8]. Let us be encouraged as we encourage others to join us as we together look to Jesus the author and finisher of faith.

Pastor John's primary thought in this passage is the powerful outworking and application of the Father's love on and in and through His people. The Father's love pushes out sin and pulls in others. Passages like 1 John 2:28-3:10 have been used in several different ways. First, some would read such a passage as a means of determining whether one is or is not a Christian. It is as if one's moral purity secures the Father's love. He loves me because I do not sin. It is used as a litmus test whereby we know we are Christians because we keep ourselves from sin and we love people. Such thinking produces significant anxiety and uncertainty in the godly. Most people who fight against sin and for joy in Jesus are IN JESUS. Another way people read this text is to separate one's initial salvation from one's ongoing activity. A failure to hate sin and to love others is to lose one's reward and standing in heaven, but still gain access to heaven. You will not go to hell, but you will also have nothing to show for your life in heaven. Such thinking produces a false distinction between my position in Christ

and the outworking of His life in me and through me to those around me.

As Pastor John has done earlier, he is drawing a distinction between those within the church and those who have left the church. Pastor John is not saying Christians do not have to work to fight against sin and to love one another, but Pastor John is saying both of those activities are natural for children of the Father.

If I showed you a picture of an alligator, every one of us knows what that thing will grow up to become. He is alligator born, he is alligator breed and when he dies he will be alligator dead. Why? Because the seed of the alligator is within him. We also know that if you plant a specific and particular seed you will get a specific and particular product. Nothing can change that. Pastor John knows this. Those who have God as their Father are born of God and His seed remains in them and they produce a pushing against sin and a pulling in of Christ's body, the church.

Pastor John has given us a world that has two parts. You are either confessing your sin and need of the Savior or you reject sin as non-consequential and thus see no need of a Savior. The bottom line for Pastor John is rather simple, "If God is your Father, then you are born of Him and you look like Him."

This text holds many challenges for us. The "key" appears to be in 1 John 3:10. Here, Pastor John notes how we can know who is or is not a confessor by two elements. First, do they practice righteousness? And second, do they love one another?

The difficulty anyone would have with such statements is a severe introspection that would call into question any sin in the life of the believer and any animosity toward anyone.

Pastor John's statements seem harsh and unyielding when he says, "No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him" (3:6). There appears to be no wiggle room. You either are or are not. The answer to such deep probing is the language of Pastor John. Pastor John identifies God as a Father who has children. Such children are born of God and have His seed within them. Pastor John believes children behave like their Father. They look like Him. Pastor John does not believe those born of the Father will act in any way different from the Father. Pastor John believes children act like their parents.

Both the devil (John 8:44) and God are fathers who have children. And both sets of children are known by their behavior. Pastor John identifies those who have left the church as being lawless and those within the church as being righteous. Friends, as those who confess our sin and Jesus as our Savior, God is our Father and like Him, we are righteous.

Let us rest in this glorious truth.

# We Should Love One Another

## 1 John 3:11-24

Our text for this lesson is 1 John 3:11-24. This passage ROCKS! This text will once again address the idea of us loving one another. There is real substance to this text that we can “sink our teeth into.” How thankful I am that God is greater than my heart (v. 20). The pinnacle of this text and the apex of His Story is found in verse 16, “We know love by this, that **He laid down His life for us.**” Isn’t that enough to take your breath away.

To love the Body of Jesus, His church, is to love Jesus. Pastor John speaks of those who practice righteousness by their continued awareness of who they are and who Jesus is. Those born of God recognize themselves inside of God’s *Story*. Those who are born of the devil do not accept God’s *Story*. They reject His authorship and thus He is right to call them sinners in need of a singular Savior. They do not practice righteousness. They are not confessors.

Throughout the letter of 1 John, there is a consistent appeal to love one’s brothers and sisters in Christ. Often such an exhortation is read individually without any thought of the larger community. Yet if we are reading the historical context for 1 John correctly, Pastor John is speaking against those who have left the local assembly either voluntarily or through church discipline. In leaving, they no longer love the leadership of the church [i.e. Pastor John and the Elders] or the assembly left behind. Pastor John’s exhortation is “do not say you love the Father, if you do not love His church.” Such a separation is impossible. Pastor John continually points out to the reader that it is impossible for one to say

they love God if they do not love Jesus and His Church [i.e. the brethren]. This is what our text speaks to.

Let me begin by noting how this passage proved to be quite the challenge in verses 19-21. There is a simplicity to what we are about to hear. Those who love Jesus also love one another. Loving Jesus is the cause, and loving others is the consequence. The one produces the other. The one flows from the other.

The idea is rather simple. Those who love Jesus seek to help those who are in need (v. 17). There can be a complexity as to how this might play out, but we must not turn a blind eye or deaf ear to those with genuine need.

Although I do not wish to dismiss or lessen the punch of its application to the individual, I do desire to keep the message of Pastor John in its context and consistent. If the brother described in Pastor John's letter is corporate and community-driven, then the idea of helping is also corporate and community-driven. What does this mean?

First, we are crafted by God for community. The *Story* is never flown solo. We come as individuals, but we never stay that way.

Second, each member within the body has unique gifting and gift expression. Thus, all of us are to love one another, but where one lacks the other abounds.

For example, as it relates to helping those in need. Some people exceed with compassionate care. They identify quickly with needy individuals and are selfless in their service toward others when it comes to specific and direct

application. Not everyone shares that gifting. Yet because of the community, the one without that specific gifting is carrying out the admonition to help the brother in need.

As a believing community, I believe we are generous with our benevolent funding **AND** I believe we are a caring community toward the agencies in our community that seek to assist our surrounding community in humanitarian activity. Not everyone involves themselves with our various corporate outreach activities, but some of us do. And many of us give when specific offerings are taken to enable and assist. It is because of the whole that we as individual parts are fulfilling the idea in 1 John 3:17.

**THIS DOES NOT DISMISS** our need to “improve” our gospel presentation in each of these activities, but it should lessen the weight of anyone feeling they have to do everything for everyone all the time.

The idea of the brother in 1 John is exactly what the Apostle Paul speaks to in 1 Corinthians 12. Friends, let us rejoice in the powerful movement taking place around us. Let us not despair, but rather let us celebrate the specific gifting of those around us and enable them by exercising our specific gifting.

Let us together thank God for His victory and the certainty of the *Story's* completion.



# The True Believer and the Spirit of Error

## 1 John 4:1-6

Our text for this lesson is 1 John 4:1-6. This text continues to warn us of the ever present threat posed by those who claim to love God but reject the biblical record concerning Jesus. Pastor John defines this tightly. The standard for measuring orthodoxy (right thinking) is Christological. Orthodoxy believes Jesus is God incarnate. Orthodoxy believes Jesus is the Christ. Orthodoxy believes Jesus forgives sin, cleanses unrighteousness, mediates in our behalf before the Father, propitiates the wrath of God and answers the justice of God, takes away sin and destroys the works of the devil and loves the local church. GLORY - HALLELUJAH! Ecclesiology [the doctrine of the church] is Christology [the doctrine of Jesus]. How you view the local church is tied to how you view the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Like the antichrist of 2:18-29, John identifies and warns the believer against false prophets. From the very onset of reading 4:1 we should recognize to whom Pastor John is referring. He identifies those who are outside the church as false prophets. Both Pastor John and the leaders of the faction claim to be speaking in behalf of God. How was the congregant to know who is or is not speaking truth?

The world in which we find ourselves is not too much different than the world in which Pastor John wrote. There are many claiming to be Christian who equally deny the message of First John. They do not believe Jesus is God incarnate. They do not believe Jesus is the Christ. They do not believe Jesus forgives sin, cleanses unrighteousness, mediates in our behalf before the Father, propitiates the

wrath of God and answers the justice of God, takes away sin and destroys the works of the devil and **loves the local church**. Such people who preach a different *Story* are false prophets, of the world, and are antichrist.

I know it would appear I am putting weight on this idea of loving the local church, but why? When you look at the scope of all who claim to be Christian teachers, it would be of interest to see how many are tied to a local church and under the oversight of a plurality of Elders. There are many large ministries with personal names attached to them that probably have no local church connection or Elder oversight. They might have a board of directors and they minister to local churches, but they themselves are not in a local church or under Elder oversight. To say you love the church means you are in the local church and under Elder oversight. Anything less than this is problematic for Pastor John.

Those who know God listen to the voice of Scripture in order that knowledge might be acquired and obedience might be forthcoming. Friend, this text is telling us something that we can find unsettling because it runs counter to our independent, autonomous spirit. Pastor John says of those who left the church, "They did not listen to us." The "us" in this text refers to Pastor John, the Elders and the local assembly. No one can claim authority from God apart from the local church and churches. And this authority or the "us" of 1 John 4: 6 resides in the plurality of Elders. There is power with the assembly as it functions under the leadership of the plurality of Elders.

This is not counter to the priesthood of every believer and individual soul liberty. You have no mediator between you and God apart from Jesus [priesthood of the believer], and

you are responsible for your own soul [individual soul liberty]. Such responsibility cannot be passed off to any governing body as is the case in the Roman Catholic structure. Thus, the idea of oversight and authority in a local assembly is not counter to these two ideas.

It is a responsibility of the plurality to keep this assembly in orthodoxy (right belief). This assembly has a theology birthed out of the text. As a consequence of the text we have orthopraxy (right behavior). We as Elders inside of the plurality are to oversee those two areas. You are to “listen” to us. You have a will that can choose to listen or not listen, but you must weigh the words.

# The Believer and the Love of God

## 1 John 4:7-21

Our text for this lesson is 1 John 4:7-21 [some would suggest going to 5:4a]. Pastor John continues to strike a singular note. He never moves us from who Jesus is and what Jesus did/does. Pastor John also considers how such love on God's part has a natural consequence. His call to love one another flows from the cross. We can love because He loves. Pastor John does not invite us to the impossible, but to the normal. His invitation is not in the abstract or invisible, but is very concrete and grabbable. Just as God loves His Church, so also do His children. Pastor John seeks to instill confidence in his congregation's relationship with God. Join us as we seek to do the same.

The themes accented in our present paragraph (4:7-21) flow freely like a raging river transcending the defined shorelines of our thinking.<sup>2</sup> It is as if we are drowning from the deluge and struggle to get our breath. At the center of it sits a God who sends His only begotten Son to be the propitiation for our sin and thus the Savior of the world. Did you hear what Pastor John just said? Jesus is the one and only who satisfies the justice of God and thus stays the wrath of God whereby He alone and only is the Savior of the world. His people are those who confess this truth. They agree with God concerning this record. O my, how can we sit unmoved by such a profound truth?

And Pastor John says it is because of this we are to love one another. And again, it is not love in the abstract, but love in the concrete. **IF GOD SO LOVED US, HOW CAN WE NOT LOVE ONE ANOTHER?** We carry grudges against our

spouses, our family members, our neighbors, our co-workers, our siblings, even with our enemies. Friends, I hesitate to say such a thing, but when we view the cross, shame on us. We should be appalled at our pettiness for it is all petty when you place it against/on the cross.

However, I would not have you wallow in such shame, but rather see it for what it is. Put it off and celebrate the majesty and magnitude of God's love for us. Thank the Father that He sent His Son to deal with your pettiness.

This entire section deals with love. We must love one another, but it must transcend the individual and must flow inside of the corporate body. We love the church because it is His body. If we love the HEAD, we must love the BODY. The two are inseparably linked. Loving the church cannot be that abstract invisible "church" whose members are unknown and unseen. The brethren we are called to love must be those within our own community of faith. It does not assume I will HATE those outside of our local church, but it does stress the need to love our LOCAL CHURCH. **The opposite of love in our text is that of fear.** Because we know not God's love we fear Him and have fear in relationships.

In my readings of 1 John, I came across two paragraphs from different sources that stirred me by their clarity. I would like to share them with you at this time.

"Here again, we find the call to love one another, woven together with that love's foundation in God's prior action for us in the Son. Confession of faith and love for one's brothers and sisters in the church are again inseparably joined, as they were in the previous Sunday's reading.

Here again are words about abiding in God and God abiding in us. So, what's new here? With this periscope [paragraph] replaying the themes of chapter 3, the preacher may have difficulty if [he's] preaching a series on these readings from 1 John. However, perhaps that sense of *déjà vu* is a point that one might explore. We never get beyond God's love for us in Christ and how that is lived out in love for one another. **We are always drawn back to that central, and centering, claim. We know God's love, first and foremost, in the Son; and we know God's love because we have witnessed it in love for one another. This text may serve as a reminder that we never grow beyond our need to hear again the gospel of God's love in Christ.**"<sup>3</sup>

This next quote addresses the idea of fear in 1 John 4:17, 18.

"The type of fear meant here is fear of punishment. The word translated 'punishment' (**kolasis**) is found in only one other place in the NT, Matthew 25:46: 'Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life' – the words with which Jesus concludes the parable of the sheep and the goats. Punishment there is what God metes out to the unrighteous on the Day of Judgment. Punishment here in 1 John is also the punishment to be meted out to the unrighteous, and it is fear of this punishment that is driven out by love. People cannot love God and fear his punishment at the same time. When the realization of God's love for us in Christ penetrates our minds and spirits, then we are perfected in love so that fear of God's judgment is removed."<sup>4</sup>

Friend, because God loves me He sent His Son to be my Savior so that I no longer need to fear His just sentence against me. This is genuine freedom from divine judgment.

# He Who Has the Son Has Life

## 1 John 5:1-13

Our text for this reading is 1 John 5:1-13. It is almost impossible, but Pastor John continues to hit “homeruns.” It is absolutely staggering to consider the words of Scripture. The singularity in which they celebrate the sufficiency of Jesus as our Savior from sin and death and the sole giver of liberty and life is beyond our finite minds to articulate or expand on. Perhaps “wow,” although inadequate, is fitting.

Our text this week is powerful. There are three notable movements stressing a singular idea. First, there is a biblical **definition** of saving faith (vv. 1-5). Then, there is a biblical **witness** to saving faith (vv. 6-9) and finally, there is a biblical **certainty** in saving faith (vv. 10-13). The entire Letter of 1 John stresses the singular nature of saving faith. Faith never operates in a vacuum. Faith must always have an object and the object of faith must be valid. For Pastor John the idea of believing and faith are one and the same. And saving faith finds Jesus as the one and only sacrifice for sin and hope of heaven.

Belief/faith in the New Testament is never vague. Belief/faith in the New Testament is THAT JESUS IS THE CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD. **Nothing less is saving faith and nothing more is necessary.** I marvel when people speak of this vague idea concerning the Messiah and what He does. Is the Messiah God or man? Is He capable of atoning sin or simply delivering His people from the oppressor? Pastor John has a very distinct and definable explanation of who and what the Messiah is and does.



The object of faith is validated by the three-fold witness: the Holy Spirit, the baptism of Jesus and His vicarious blood sacrifice.

As a consequence of Jesus being the Christ, the Son of God, He can impart eternal life. He has within Himself life and gives life to the dead and dying. Only Jesus can raise the dead to life. Only Jesus can transport those who exist in the realm of death into His kingdom of life and light. This is the power of the gospel. To have Jesus is to have life and to reject Jesus is to continue in death.

There are no excuses suitable to negate such an atrocity as the rejection of God's provision in the person and work of Jesus Christ. To say no is to accuse God Almighty of lying. It is to say God Himself is a liar. How harsh is the heart of humanity and how deceptive is sin's assault on the human condition. God has made the way and to reject such provision is to invite the justice of God against the wickedness of man.

Pastor John is very straightforward in his statement. If you reject the record, you are calling God a liar. If you accept the record, you have eternal life. Pastor John's intent is that you would know with certainty that you have eternal life and this life is inseparably linked to His Son Jesus the Christ.

Is it possible to have eternal life apart from believing what the Holy Spirit says concerning God's Son? The answer is no. Let us not deceive ourselves on this matter. Pastor John says of those who left the church because of their aberrant theology concerning the Christ that they do not have eternal

life. This simple premise is still true. The issue isn't leaving the church; the issue is what you believe concerning Jesus.

Either God is telling us the truth or He is lying. If He is telling the truth, then Jesus is our only hope for having our sins forgiven, our unrighteousness cleansed, our sins taken away, His justice being answered and His wrath removed. Jesus is the only way anyone can come before the Father without shame and with full confidence of being received.

How do we move from death to life? How do we receive forgiveness and cleansing? The provision made by Jesus through His death is received by believing. The issue confronting us today is rather simple — will you believe what God has said about you and your sin is true or will you call Him a liar? Will you believe what God has said concerning His Son is true or will you call Him a liar?

If I have to convince you of your sinfulness, then you are not ready to believe God. But if you know you are sinful and I do not have to convince you of your own damnation, then I wish to tell you just how wonderful God is in the sending of His Son Jesus to be your Savior from sin and death.

No one but God can stay His hand or silence His sentencing. God has done everything necessary for you and me to come. It is finished, it is done and all who thirst may come. In Christ is life. O my friend, may we never stray from the simplicity of such truth. May His lavish provision in the person and work of Jesus fill us to overflow and may we be equally relentless in our pursuit of Him who alone is worthy of every ounce of our affection and energy.

When Martin Luther faced the mighty Roman Catholic Church on charges of heresy he was warned with these words by a cardinal. “The pope’s little finger is stronger than all of Germany. Do you expect your princes to take up arms to defend you – you, a wretched worm like you? I tell you, no, and where will you be then?” Luther replied: “I’ll be right where I am now – in the hands of God.”

Friend, Luther’s confidence can and is to be our confidence.

To Him be the glory now and forever more.

# Assurance of One's Standing Before the Father

1 John 5:13-21

Our text for this study is 1 John 5:13-21. It is hard to imagine once again we are at the end of an entire Book study. First John has been a huge blessing to me personally and I trust to you. I find it impossible to oversell the study. The Holy Spirit [thankfully] overrides our [read "my" — I own this] own stupidity and stubbornness and brings us blessing from the biblical text. Because we believe Jesus, God hears us and keeps us. Did you hear me? **God hears us AND keeps us!** Wow, how humbling and how great is that? Words fail.

Some would consider Pastor John's first letter a means of determining if one is or is not saved. As such the letter is read with various standards or means placed before the reader and if the reader has those means in his life, then he is saved. However, I believe such an approach is misguided. **The litmus test is not the fruit but rather the root.**

For Pastor John, to believe in His name is to believe in Him. Everything he has said in this letter concerning Jesus is believed. To believe what is written is to believe "in the name of the Son of God."

The belief described in verse 13 is a present active participle. It is the exact same thought expressed in verse one. Again, faith is not seen as a past fact, but a present reality. It is not what you have believed, but what you believe.

Everything Pastor John has written is to assure them of who Jesus is and what they have in Him. In Him is life. Outside

of Him there is no life. Those to whom Pastor John writes have life. Those who have rejected this message and have left the fellowship do not have life.

Verse 20 assures us that God gives to His children understanding so that they can lay hold of their position in Christ. Everything John has spoken of is far loftier than current Christianity dares to live. Yet God has given us a mind that can comprehend that which is beyond our most hoped for desire.

Pastor John leaves us with two simple thoughts that are to encourage us as we live out our faith. First, as His children, God hears us when we are talking to Him. Second, as His children, God keeps us from sin/falling away.

If one agrees with God concerning themselves and their need of a Savior and if this Savior is God incarnate who is Jesus the Christ God's only begotten Son, then their sins are forgiven and their unrighteousness is cleansed. Then Jesus is their advocate and the one and only sacrifice for sin that can satisfy the judgment of God against them. This and only this is the sole means of bringing certainty to those who would doubt their standing before the Father.

As a consequence of this provision from God, righteousness follows in loving their brothers and sisters in Christ who are also part of the local assembly. Such righteousness never establishes standing. Loving one's brother or sister in Christ never equals loving God. Loving God causes love for one's brother and sister. In the absence of loving God one cannot love one's brother or sister [i.e. the local church]. This is Pastor John's clear message.

The absolutely incredibly good news Pastor John leaves the church with is this: God hears you when you pray and God keeps you and the devil cannot touch you. How great is this?! Friend, rest in knowing Jesus. **Nothing less is saving faith and nothing more is necessary.**

# Protect the Gospel

## 2 John

Our text for this short reading is 2 John. What Pastor John clearly defines in his first Letter, he does not desire to see lost in his second Letter. As recipients of salvation, we are now called on to protect the gospel. We must not edit or alter the truth we've heard concerning the gospel.

The message from Pastor John in his first letter and now here in his second letter is consistent. Both are centered on and around the person and work of Jesus Christ.

His thoughts concerning abiding are clear. Those who continue in their confession of Jesus as sent from God to be the Savior of sinners abide in the teaching and have life.

Not to remain in this confession is not to have God. Although it appears stark, it is actually quite clear. The loss of reward noted in verse 8 is in the context of failing to abide in the teaching or to walk in truth [the two statements are one and the same].

The warning in verses 10 and 11 call us to guard the gospel message. In the first century church congregants were expected to enable those who went forth in the name of Jesus to preach Him throughout the regions. By enabling the congregation was participating in their mission. Third John will say as much in 3 John 8.

Pastor John's collective warning is to guard the Gospel taught to them by him. Mack Stiles in his work, *Marks of the*

*Messenger*, makes the following four points as he seeks to stress the need to protect the gospel.

- The Gospel is accepted.
- The Gospel is assumed.
- The Gospel is confused.
- The Gospel is lost.

Once the gospel is accepted, often the next generation who is brought up in the faith simply assumes it is true. In time, the gospel message is confused and eventually lost. Each generation of believers must be diligent in guarding the gospel. Should they slack in their responsibility there is always the strong potential of persistent decay until the gospel would finally be lost.

Fortunately, God wins and the gospel can never be fully or finally lost. Yet how unfortunate it is for us to be sleeping at our post when we are to stand fast as alert sentinels as we proclaim the gospel.



# Share the Gospel

## 3 John

Here is what I'm learning from our study of Pastor John's Letters — the gospel is not only to be **known** (1 John) and **protected** (2 John), but it is to be **shared** (3 John). There is a great dialogue between being too loose (religious liberalism) with the gospel and being too tight (religious legalism) with the gospel in Pastor John's Letters. The issue is the gospel.

Pastor John enables the reader to know what constitutes the biblical gospel. His Christology is clear and precise. He does not dabble with much that distracts from this. He might assume we know more than we do, but there is little variance from and doubt of **the gospel**. In his second letter he chides the church for being **too loose** with the gospel. Not everyone who says, "Lord, Lord" is actually saved. However, in his third letter he chides the leadership of the church, Diotrephes, for being **too tight** by not assisting and enabling the gospel.

If we bring the polarizing of the gospel in the first century into our current landscape, we have on one hand **liberalism** and on the other hand **legalism**. Liberalism lets everyone in while legalism lets no one in. With liberalism everyone is a brother while with legalism no one is a brother. In liberalism no one dots the "i" or crosses the "t" while in legalism everyone must write in cursive or they are not "in."

The "key" between these two extremes is to know what constitutes the gospel. On this Pastor John is clear. Alliances are to be forged on and from the gospel. The gospel recognizes everyone is a sinner in need of saving.

Jesus is the Savior who saves sinners. He is the incarnate Christ who takes away sin by becoming the only blood sacrifice that can satisfy the justice of God and remove us from the wrath of God. He only and alone is the one Advocate the sinner has before the Father. It is only in confessing this truth that sins are forgiven and unrighteousness is cleansed. It is only in Jesus that any sinner can appear before the Father with confidence and without shame in the Day of Judgment. This, my friends, is the gospel. Do you know the gospel? Do you protect the gospel? Do you share the gospel?

# Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *Epistles of John*, 135.

<sup>2</sup> “The structure of this passage and the progression of thought within it are difficult to explain, even though the smaller units which make it up are easy to identify.” Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, PNTC (Eerdmans, 2000), 156.

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=1288](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1288)

<sup>4</sup> Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, PNTC (Eerdmans, 2000), 168, 169.

# Studies in 1 John 1 of 11

Pastor John writes in response to an unsettling that has impacted the local churches in Asia Minor of which he has oversight. There is a factious group who either left the local church voluntarily or had been removed through church discipline causing strife and doubt to enter the hearts and minds of God's people. Their error is a rejection of their own personal sin and thus a need for their own personal Savior. They reject Jesus as God incarnate. They reject Him as God's only begotten Son. Because they refuse to see themselves as sinners and thus in need of a Savior, they equally reject the thought that Jesus is a substitutionary sacrifice which atones for sin, placates God's just sentence against sinners and then stands before the Father to mediate their own station before Him. Pastor John writes this short letter to refute the error and confirm the saints. This is the message/promise (1:5; 2:25) Pastor John brings. Pastor John has a very distinct and definable Christology. We will consider Pastor John's Christology as found in his first Letter as we look at the Letter paragraph by paragraph.

