

1 John: Going Deeper in Christ Posted by Bob Young

1	1:1-4			
2	1:5-7	2:3-6	3:4-10	
3	1:8-10	2:1-2		
4		2:12-17		
5		2:18-27	4:1-6, 9-10	
6		2:28-29	3:1-10	
7		2:7-11	3:11-18	4:7-21
8			3:18-24	5:1-20

Introduction

What does it mean when we say we want to "go deeper" in Christ or in our faith?

The best way to answer such a question is to search the Scriptures. When I think about growing in faith and developing a profound understanding of Jesus, one book that comes to mind is 1 John. The language is easy, subject matter is simple and straightforward: truth (right doctrine), obedience (right living), and love (right relationships). The cyclical structure (repetitive phrasing) of the book invites deep reflection on basic Christian themes. Further, one purpose of the letter was to strengthen and assure believers in this three areas.

Here is a Bible study that is exegetically strong and focused on personal spiritual vitality. The first letter of John (1 John) spells out exactly what a deep life with Christ looks like and why really knowing Christ is the most important piece.

-1- Deep Joy

To know deep, lasting joy, we have to truly know Christ. [1 John 1:1–4]

Sincere Christians want to "go deeper" in faith and in their knowledge of the Scriptures.

Primary theme: WHO IS JESUS?

There can be no genuine joy without understanding who Jesus is.

Knowing Christ, knowing Scripture. It is impossible to know Christ without knowing the Bible.

Written word → living word.

Three senses are here appealed to (hearing, sight, touch) as combining to show the reality of Christ's humanity against the Docetic Gnostics; John is qualified by experience to speak. But Jesus is also "the Word of life" and so God Incarnate.

Compare John 1:1ff

Spiritual depth isn't simply about knowledge (a common misconception), but about everyday life and relationships. Knowing about Jesus is only the first step. Knowing about Jesus allows the Christian to know Christ—to understand him and establish a close, meaningful relationship with him. The constant presence of Jesus in our lives is a source of joy. Where better to begin than reflecting on Jesus? Here is how one develops a deeper, inner joy in Christ.

That is the purpose of this series of studies.

The life John describes is a life of joy.

The life is revealed

The life is experienced

The life is shared

John also tells us why he wrote the book.

That we may have fellowship, 1:3

That we may have joy, 1:4

That we may not sin, 2:1

That we may not be deceived, 2:26

That we may know we have eternal life, 5:13

We can observe three primary themes: obedience, love, and truth.

In chapters 1-2, John emphasizes fellowship. The conditions of fellowship with God are obedience (1:5-2:6), love (2:7-17), and truth (2:8-29).

Beginning in 3:1, John will write about the fact that we are sons.

Obedience, love, and truth. Why did John write about these? We are made in God's image.

We have a mind to think, a heart to feel, a will to make decisions. This is intellect, emotion, and will. The intellect must think about truth. The will must decide to obey. The heart must love.

John will also write about the Holy Spirit.

A mind controlled by the Spirit knows and understands truth.

A heart controlled by the Spirit experiences love.

A will controlled by the Spirit will obey.

Fellowship. When a believer is out of fellowship with God, is usually for one of three reasons.

Disobedience

Not getting along with other Christians

Believes a lie, lives a lie. 1 John 3:7.

Can you see the parallel? These three reasons parallel the themes of obedience, love, and truth. What we need is forgiveness, 1 John 1:9-2:2.

Is your joy deep, authentic, lasting?

-2- Deep Walk

We were made to live (to walk) in Jesus Christ. [1 John 1:5-7; 2:3-6; 3:4-10]

Primary Theme: WHAT DOES JESUS WANT?

How do you know if someone is a real Christian?

Is Christianity measured by external indicators like the amount of time spent serving in the community or the Bible on one's desk? Is Christianity measured by whether one uses bad words or goes to church a lot? No, Christianity is not measured only by externals. Lots of people read the Bible, help in the community, go to church, and do not curse. Are they all Christians? How do you know if you are a Christian?

Christianity is reflected in how we walk. That is a New Testament way of saying how we live. It is our life in the light, a life of obedience, a life of imitating Jesus, a life of separation from sin, a life of righteousness.

There is a lot of difference between saying and doing. 1:6,8,10; 2:4.

Living in darkness, living in light.

We should not detour far from the three themes: obedience, love, and truth.

The order is easiest: truth, obedience, love.

Because John is often described as the apostle of love, you may be surprised that love is not a more important part of these introductory texts to the first three chapters. Love is important, but for John, it is not the first factor in a deep Christian life. It is the by-product. First, God's love has to be perfected in our lives. That is done through truth and obedience. The truth about God's love motivates us to obedience, and thus to purity. We are able to love because he first loved us. Until God's love is perfected in our lives (2:5; 4:12, 17-18), our talk about love is meaningless. Until we know truth and obedience, and thus learn to love the right things (which includes quitting loving the wrong things), we cannot love like God loves.

Is your lifestyle real, deep, dependable?

-3-Deep Cleansing

Our sin is real, but our God willingly forgives. [1 John 1:8–2:2]

Primary Theme: WHAT GOD HAS DONE

You don't hear the word sin much these days. We're more comfortable with words like dysfunction, disease, mistakes, shortcomings, frustrations, failures. In fact, a few years ago, the *Oxford Junior Dictionary* removed the word sin from its contents. The editors explained that it had fallen into disuse and was no longer relevant to younger generations.

We want to live a deep, committed life in Christ, but our humanity gets in the way. The human experience is too common. We go backward; we fall down; we sin; we deceive ourselves. What does that say about us as Christians? Are Christians sinless? No, Christians are constantly forgiven. God forgives; Jesus is our propitiation; Jesus is our mediator.

We are powerless with regard to sin. God is totally powerful and through Jesus has forgiven our sins.

What do to with sin?

We can cover our sins

We can confess our sins

We can be cleansed from our sins

We can thus conquer our sins

Have you dealt with sin biblically? Is your cleansing real, deep, authentic?

-4- Deep Desire

Let Christ fill your hunger. [1 John 2:12–17]

Primary Theme: HOW WE SHOULD RESPOND—OBEDIENCE, COMMITMENT AND DISCIPLESHIP

Christians must develop the right kind of love.

Christians have a love-hate relationship with the world. On one hand, the most famous verse in the Bible tells us that “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.” If God loves the world that much, it seems like we should too. But then comes a passage like this, where John warns us not to love the world or anything in the world. So which is it—love or hate? Are we to forsake all worldly pleasures? How does a Christian live in this world without being of this world? The key is to live so that Christ is our primary hunger. Christians hunger and thirst after righteousness, as the deer wants water. The primary goal of the Christian is spiritually-centered, Christ-centered. Christians spend most of their time thinking about spiritual things.

We should not love the world....

Because of what the world is

Because of what the world does to us

Because of who we are

Because of where the world is going

The things of this world are temporary. Life is not focused here in the present; life is focused in the future.

Think about your heart, your will. What do you really want in life? Is your desire authentic, deep, real, biblical?

-5- Deep Truth

Jesus came to rescue and to redeem his creation. [1 John 2:18-27; 4:1–6, 9–10]

Primary Theme: THE TRUTH SHALL SET YOU FREE

Most of us understand that what we claim to believe about Jesus has implications for our own lives, and for our friends who hold different beliefs. In a world where so many people have such different views, how could it be possible that one view is greater or better than other views? Is there really only one way—one path—that leads to God? Is it enough to believe in God? Does what we believe about Jesus make that much difference?

Many believe it makes no difference what one believes, as long as one is sincere! Such cannot be true.

Our understanding of Jesus is critical to our relationship with God. First, Jesus is the Son of God. That means that he is divine, he is deity, he is part of the God-head. That truth has profound implications for who has authority in my life and who has the right to control my life. Second, Jesus came in the flesh. These are the same declarations that John included in the first chapter of his Gospel. Jesus came from God, but took human form. Third, Jesus died for our sins so

that we might truly live, and this is how love is defined. This is how we understand the true nature of love. Love depends on a truth or doctrine believed, then genuinely practiced (obeyed), so that motives can be seen. This is always the sequence—truth, obedience, love. Any other sequence is not consistent with biblical teaching.

The example John gives in the text is that of the antichrist. This is John's way of talking about a false teacher who is controlled by the "spirit of antichrist." That is, who has the understanding and attitude and action that opposes Christ, denying who Christ is.

The antichrist already existed in John's day.

The antichrist departs from fellowship with Christians, 2:18-19

The antichrist denies the faith, 2:20-25, 4:1-6

The antichrist tries to deceive the faithful, 2:26-29

Why do some Christians so easily accept false teachings? Because they are not abiding in the Spirit. Remember that: a mind controlled by the Spirit knows and understands truth; a heart controlled by the Spirit experiences love; a will controlled by the Spirit obeys.

False teachers do not abide, 2:19

The message (truth) should abide in us, 2:24

The Holy Spirit (anointing) abides in us, 2:27

We should abide in the Holy Spirit, 2:27

As we abide in the word and the Spirit, we also abide in Christ, 2:28

If we say we abide in Christ, we must walk as he walked, 2:6

If we love our brother, we abide in the light, 2:10

If the word abides in us (truth), we are spiritually strong, 2:14

If we do the will of God (obey), we abide forever, 2:17

Verses 28 and 29 give us a bridge from fellowship to sonship.

Think about your relationship with God. Is it based on truth that is real, authentic, biblical?

-6- Deep Hope

We are being formed into the likeness of Christ. [1 John 2:28–3:3; 3:4-10]

Primary Theme: CHRISTIANS—LIKE CHRIST, TRANSFORMED

As we go deeper into 1 John and study carefully, we have to think about the kind of person we want to be. Our faith depends on certain understandings of Jesus (teachings, doctrines). In the New Testament, there is a doctrinal test of faith. The profound truth is that Jesus Christ was fully God and fully man and is the only way to eternal life.

Based on this understanding of Jesus, there is an ethical dimension to our faith. This is obedience. Our hope is not based in how good we are or even how perfectly we do his will. Remember our "deep cleansing." Christians do not habitually practice sin. Christians live by principles and values.

The key verse is 3:10. A true child of God practices righteousness (truth and obedience) and loves other Christians in spite of differences. The first part is 3:1-10; the second part is 3:11-24. Born of God, 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18

Why do we have hope?

God the Father loves us, 3:1-3

God the Son died for us, 3:4-8

To forgive sins, 3:4-6

To destroy the works of the devil, 3:7-8

God the Spirit lives in us, 3:9-10

Think about your own life.

Do you have the divine nature, or are you merely pretending to be a Christian?

Do you cultivate the divine nature by daily Bible reading and prayer?

Do unconfessed sins defile your nature?

Does your old nature control your thoughts and desires, or does the divine nature rule?

Do you flee temptation?

Think about your hope. Is it authentic, real, deep, biblical? Is it based in truth, and obedience?

-7- Deep Love

We show true love through sacrifice. [1 John 2:7-8, 9-11; 3:11-15, 16-18; 4:7-21]

Primary Theme: BIBLICAL LOVE IS NOT EASY

You knew we would eventually have to talk about love. First, we had to consider the tests of true faith—the marks of a real Christian. John has written at length about the ethical test (how we live—obedience) and the doctrinal test (what we believe—truth). These are primary. To start in another place is to build a false foundation.

On the other hand, doctrine and lifestyle do not tell the whole story. Christianity has always focused on the relationships of life, healthy relationships, loving like Jesus loved. Here is the relational test of Christianity: who do you love, and how do you love?

1 John 2:7-11

Note how John connects light and love, 2:7-8. Walking in light is more than only love, it is purity, commitment, beliefs, transformation, sacrifice, lifestyle, actions.

Love is a new emphasis, 2:7

Love is a new example, 2:8

Love is a new experience, 2:9-11

1 John 3:11-24

Textual study

1 John 4:7-11: Textual study

What God is: God is love, 4:7-8

What God did: he sent his son, 4:9-11

What God is doing: he abides in us, 4:12-16

Therefore, we have....

Confidence, 4:17-19

Honesty, 4:20-21

Joyful obedience, 5:1-3

Victory, 5:4-5

-8- Deep Certainty

To know Jesus is to confidently know eternal life. [1 John 3:18-24; 5:1-10, 11–20]

Primary Theme: WHAT YOU CAN KNOW FOR CERTAIN

This is the final lesson in our study of John's first letter—a letter that was written a long time ago (possibly to the church in Ephesus). It speaks very powerfully to our own lives, to Christians and to churches in the 21st century. It is simple, but it raises all kinds of questions. Our final topic is the confidence we have as we look toward the future.

What do you know for sure?

Loving God and obeying his commands is the first evidence that I love others, 5:1-3

Victory is certain in Jesus, 5:4-5

Jesus is God, 5:6-10

Believers have eternal life, 5:11-13

God answers prayer, 5:14-15

Christians do not practice sin, 5:16-19

The Christian life is the only life that can be called real, deep, authentic, 5:20-21