

HOUSE GROUPS PLAN

In the next three house groups we are going to look at 1 John. The aim of these studies isn't to re-do a detailed verse by verse analysis of the letter - hopefully the Sunday morning sermons have been doing that. The point is to take three of the key themes, to make sure we have grasped what the letter is saying, and to take some time to apply those points to us as a church and as individuals.

The three themes are

- Dealing with Sin
- Understanding who Jesus is
- Loving one another

THE MESSAGE OF 1 JOHN

As I've been preaching through the letter hopefully the big picture has been clear. The apostle is writing to a church that is struggling because a group have left them. This church needs to be re-assured that they are in the right and to be encouraged not to follow those who have gone. John tells them that the gospel he preached is the true gospel, because he gave them the message of the true Jesus Christ (1:1-4). If they stick with that, they can know they have eternal life (5:13). Those who have left haven't just left their church, they have left the apostle's teaching, and have revealed that they never really knew Jesus Christ. They have returned to the world - that is, they show they are still in rebellion against God like all those outside of Christ.

The three tests that John brings in the letter are not meant to be used as introspective tests we use of ourselves to see if we can have assurance. They are tests that reveal that those who have left are not true Christians. These false Christians don't deal with sin in a right way (they are claiming they don't need the cross of Christ to deal with their sin), they don't believe truth about Jesus (they are denying his humanity), and they are not showing love towards other Christians.

1 John should be a very comforting letter to us if we know Jesus Christ, and if we are sticking with the apostles teaching. We are reminded that there will always be pressure not to do this. Knowing this helps us when there is false teaching around that seems attractive, and when it is taught even by people we know or we once trusted. It is a letter which assures us we are on the right path and encourages us to keep going.

It is a very realistic letter (as you would expect from the word of God) - it neither lets us become complacent about our sin, nor does it let us despair at our failures. John is concerned to fix our attention on the Lord Jesus Christ, and to make sure we have an accurate knowledge of who he is and what he has done.

Obviously 1 John is very convicting if we have drifted from Jesus Christ, or if we have never known him at all. If that is the case, then the very tests that are meant to comfort show up serious problems. Our response then should be to hear what those tests are saying about us, and to repent and trust in Christ.

DEALING WITH SIN (1:5-2:11)

This section is structured by a series of statements beginning “if we say.....” or “whoever says”. John has in his sights the false teachers who are claiming to know God, but are showing that they don’t by their attitude to sin. In this study we will go through each statement, and see why they are wrong, and what the right response should be.

Please make sure you spend time on applying the message of the passage - don’t just leave it as an exercise in comprehension. Each of these false claims are still heard today, and deep down we might even be tempted to believe them ourselves. John’s response to each false claim is to draw us back to the truth of the gospel.

Hopefully the verses are straightforward - if you want to hear again the way I approached them my sermons are online at the website.

Some tricky questions that may come up are about 2:2 - in the study do your best to focus on propitiation (the turning aside of God’s wrath), and try not to get bogged down with the last phrase. A key part of John’s argument in chapter 1 is that God is “faithful and just”, so if Jesus has died for us he must forgive us. If Jesus died for every individual in the world then they must be saved. But this is not what the end of 2:2 is saying. John regularly uses the phrase “world” to refer to the rebellion of mankind against God (for example John 3:16). He is not stating that Jesus died for every individual - he is stating that the only hope for mankind in rebellion against God is in the cross of Christ, and that is true whether you are a Jew, Gentile, or anyone else.

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS

What is the message about God that John proclaims? Why is this both good news and bad news for us?

What is the first wrong claim in verse 6 (see also 2:3-6)? What would this look like in practice?

What is the right response? (vs 7) What does this look like in practice?

What is the second wrong claim in verse 8?

What should we do with our sin instead? (vs 8-9)

Why is it such good news that God is “faithful and just”? Why doesn’t he simply say “faithful and merciful” or “faithful and forgiving”?

Why is the third wrong claim so bad (see verse 10)?

What does John tell us about Jesus that means that we neither give up on fighting sin in our lives, or despair of our own sinfulness (vs 1-2)?

What is the final false claim (2:9)? Why do you think John include this? What is the right response?

Have you ever heard any of these false claims? Have you ever been tempted to believe them yourself? Can you think of any situations when you might?